THE water-sparkle dances, busily quiet around the central glare of silence. There's a million-a-minute of points of halation all hopping-mad on the periphery. Too white-hot and soundless to look at the focal point where the rays bounce off from the mutative surface, all at the same angle as the angle of incidence. But you can screw up your eyes or look through a crack in your fingers and watch it at the outside edge where it thins out into the black of the sea. Or you can frown till the dark of your eyebrows comes cragging over into the sight, shading the shining iris and saving the pain in the back of the eyes.

Sparkles and startles of pin-points of light-scatter, endless and ceaseless.

Like looking straight at the sun, really, only splintered and shattered and quicksilver darting.

Away from the glare the water is grey because the blinding has washed out the colour from your eyes. There's a kind of a steamy white haze, milky on the water-top, vague and hot. Nowhere to focus, nothing to hold the rove of the sight, giving the vision a dream-white swimminess, cushioning the brain at the back of the eyes till your lids come down and there's warm orange shining through the dark. Then you get blue coming from below and the sides and it wipes out the orange and there are figments of black floating sideways in the blue. Now the blue fades but the floaters remain suspended in suffusions of yellow that spread from the corners. The warmth of the light on your lids comes through and you breathe in deep and go good and limp. You shift on your backside because of the pebble between the grass and the left-hand posterior process of the iliac.

Sparkle still sparkles with a silent noise; there's a latent image on the back of the lids that mingles with the floaters and you can

hear it with the intensity of silence. Hear it with some other ear. In the midline at the back, maybe, just above the occiput. The occipital ear for sparkles on a sunshiny day on the cliff-edge scraggy with grass. Noise of the summer sky is louder and louder; there's the overall hiss of the heaven's high silence, and the earshaped ear is filled with unbearable breathless vastness till the tweet of a skyborne creature cuts it off like a switch. Dispells the spell with a nervous tweet and brings back the silent silence. Bearable silence. Neutral background baseline for tweets and squawks and the noises made by blades of grass as they touch and bow and scrape.

As the wind blew one evening over a field of grass it caused a gentleman blade of grass to bend and rub gently against a lady blade of grass. In the morning, when the lady blade woke up she found she was lying on her back. My God, she said, I've been reaped.

It was actually a field of corn.

First shot shows sun streaking low over corn, casting long shadows and picking out heavy-laden ears as they wave. Camera tracks in and we see that it has picked out two particular ears to whom we are being introduced in close-up as the camera gets nearer. The two ears fill the screen. One is long and slender and waves in the breeze with a conscious grace. The other is grosser, taller, burly, and moves in a smooth arc across the lady as the wind blows. The camera dwells on the pair for a few moments and we have no difficulty in figuring out what it's all about. The picture widens out as the camera withdraws upwards into the sky giving us a top shot of the whole field as the waves of windsweep travel across it. The camera pans up into the setting sun and there is a slow fade. Subdued chuckles from the audience to prove that it has seen the point and the screen brightens up again on a close-up of the lady ear of corn flat on her back. We see that all the other ears of corn are gathering round her in a circle, bending down to see what it's all about like people at an accident. The screen is filled with her head (diagonally because you can't get it so big if you try it upright) and she says My God I've been reaped.

THE END—or maybe FIN. FIN is better, especially the way they have it coming out of the distance at you suddenly the way they do. FIN would give it substance on account of being French. Pronounced FAN, not FINN. You could put that underneath in italics if it were for general release. (In brackets.) Not FAN really, sort of FA with no ending. Opening at the end like a goldfish's mouth, and nasal. There is no nose on a goldfish. In any case far too long for italics in brackets. Keep it to repertory cinemas and film societies.

The yellow velvet of lids spreads warm like a honey-coloured ermine over the shifting senses. But senses creep out from under the hem of the veil to taste the reality of pebble on pelvis, tweet of the sky, smell of the scrabbly grass beneath. You can't pin them under the yellow oblivion for long. Like furious guests at a garden party who've had the marquee collapse on them. There's a bubbling turmoil of shifting shapes belting around in the dark of the shroud; looking for a way out. They escape from under the edge and ripsnort and belly-ache shouting each other the way into the sunshine. If you don't lash up the guy-ropes and pounce on each with a mallet as he pops out you'll be wide-awake with senses aroar and the feel of the draught in the thighs or the smell of the sweat in your armpits. And the spell of the warmyellow eyelids be gone.

Noise of the universe streams out loud over the bay and the top of the cliff; silent vault of blue roaring. Harder you listen the louder it gets, ears overwhelmed with deafening stillness. With your ear to the shell of the world you can pick up the wave length of outer-spatial radiation. Cosmic, interplanetary sound of the cold reaches, hum of the great dynamo; call-sign of creation.

This is the great merging; God and Sir James Jeans and Galileo conjoin the wisdom of their several breaths in the vast unbearable shout of all eternity, fusing it with the silent roar of spinning worlds and the shouts of the hosts of the dead; with the noise of the growth of the acorn, the click of the binomial theorem, the wheeze of weltschmerz in an expanding universe.

This is the noise you hear if you stand on the corner of one of

the alleys of starstrewn space where inactivity and draughtless immensity mingle in multidimensional nothingness. Where gauntly still perspectives echo with the breath of a long-drawn sigh (like the distant whisper of the roar of yesterday's football stadium).

Finely balanced between your ears, from neither side is it stronger. Turn your head to gauge its source and you'll find it has none. It's everywhere, directionless. It shafts from outside into the head with a focal point midway. And there it sizzles and fizzles like rays from a two-way burning-glass, fierce and bright.

And you want to bust out yelling to banish it. Throw fire-crackers into galactic nebulae, send manhole covers trundling down the endless voids; raise hell in heaven to cover up the roar of quiet that meets and fizzles between the ears. You'd like to see the urgent red of fire-brigade careening headlong down the shifting vistas, startling the wastes of interstellar space with concentric rings of clangour. Scream of brakes as it rounds the hairpin bend of a bunch of unsuspecting satellites and the bell changes to a diminishing doppler effect as it streams into infinity, leaves the night richer only for echoes.

But the insistent fizz of silence returns as the bell dies away and you're on your own in the chill vast of infinity.

Damn cold out here in the nebulae.

But why damn cold when the sun is out there too? and why dark? Why black velvet and cold up there in the vast when here the lids are warm and honey-coloured? There must be some mistake.

The pebble again on the sacrum.

You shift again and the lids open and the noise of the world dies down as sight comes up. It's a greenish world, though, through having gazed at the sun through the lids for so long. Always happens. Colour washed out and greenish but alright in a minute. Bay below is greenish now and the eye wanders over the steamy flat of the sunlit water. You turn your head as you shade the face with thumbs to temples, fingers laced.

There's an angry jutting of rocks to the left, tumbling out

from the land. There are wet patches where the light gleams but the rocks are black against the shimmer. They've fallen away from the cliff on some long-forgotten night when thunder raged and the earth reared, frightened at the agony in the skies. They were split away from the mother land in a roar and flash and the thunder rolled and mixed with the sound of the pounding weight of the falling mass. Water boiled and foamed in the wild darkness as the rocks were shocked with the sudden swill of angry tide and they spilt sideways on to the sea-bed.

Flaked and crumbled along the lines of their stratification and faces of rock that never had thought to feel the rush of the wind or the salt of the lash of water were suddenly exposed. As fresh and unweathered as the stub of an amputation.

But settled and foundered into the night sea, with only the smaller fragments answering to the swell and swirl of the bubbling water. Soon the crumble of wounded rock had bedded itself in the warmth of the sand that lay beneath and the scarred face of the mother rock above was left to glisten in the night spray, to be washed and weathered by the thousand nights and days that were still to come before your eyes were to watch today from the top of the grey-green cliff.

In the morning, after the wind had died and the seas stilled, some fresh-faced girl had wandered from her mother's cottage to see what souvenirs the storm had left. Her feet dew-spattered as she walked to the top of the cliff and the sun came up across the sea before her. Her face was young and freckled and the breeze flicked straggles of hair from under the headscarf, narrowing her blue eyes and moulding the rough brown dress to her body.

May have been a morning when Chaucer had got up with a headache or when Joan of Arc had heard the voices over on the other side of the water there. Or maybe it was the day when Pasteur found some of his sheep still lovely alive. Whatever the day and no matter when, she had come to the edge of the cliff and looked over.

She had breathed a breath on that bright morning as she saw the maimed rocks fallen, there in the shimmer of sea. Had seen

the fresh scars of the standing rock where the fall had happened and she'd thought of the night's fury when her face had been turned to the wall in her narrow bed and the wind had creaked and groaned the cottage about her and she hadn't known of the agony on the shore.

The breath she breathed and the sparkle of dew on her shoes were as real as the morning, as real as the sound of the humming universe; but now she's as dead as the dead-strewn rocks. Peered over the edge and was urgent with the immediate pulse of the moment. This was her reality. Now she lives in a dead reality with only the cairn of rocks to mark her urgent moment.

She was unobserved on her bright morning as she faced the breeze. As she turned away from the edge and went back to the cottage and lived her many years and loved her country man and bore his freckled children and grew old and died she never knew she was observed. But from this same cliff-edge she is now observed and savoured and her reality is re-awakened. She's still as real as then and now she's got some hundred tons of rockpile monument.

Hundred tons are away on the left down there below and if you lean forward a little past the stubble of cliff-grass you can see how the arm of the bay swings round in a sandy sweep beneath you with a line of seaweed brown on the yellow floor where last night the tide was. The rocks at the left are full stop to the end of the inswung bay. You sweep round below and there are light grey boulders scattered in clumps above the line of the seaweed's curve, but they're round and smooth and dry, not jagged and angry like the rocks at the end. Different vintage. Been pounded and rounded by timeless weather since long before Chaucer's headache and now they sit in the sun at the end of their time. You can see little puddles of water beneath them, dark in the shadows but translucent if you went to have a good look. Cool crawly things wiggling in the pools and over and under the sea-washed pebbles. If you could listen hard enough you'd hear the splash and plop of their coming and going.

Far round to the right where the arm of the bay hazes out to meet the horizon there are rocks again but they're shimmery in the heat and dissolve into sea and sky before you can catch them sharp on the retina. The cliff goes right the way round from the rocks on the left to the haze on the right and there's no way down except by parachute.

You can't figure out where the sky meets the sea straight ahead because of the haze and the melting mix of greys and blues. But it's the water-sparkle under the sun that your eye comes back to. White hot blare in the centre where the water's a mirror and spread out in farflung splash of twinkling; a million dancing darting lights.

Centre of the bay is incandescent with the scorch of the light on the cool water. You can feel it flickering up in your face and touching the palms of the shielding hands. Closer in where the half-hearted lap of the water moves in a broken line on the sand there's a flicker and flash as the light flicks the wave-tops but out in the middle the light's too bright for eyes.

Try to fix one of the points of sparkle in the plane of the water and it's gone before you know and never comes back. Never in the same place twice. One to the left and one to the right and never a one in the place where the last one flashed.

Lovely.

The lights dance out of the water as though they played suspended in a plane six inches away from the surface. They stand out stereoscopically in halated blobs free of the sea and the poppling ripples, flashing a million counter-changes in half a split second.

It's as though you wired up a million close-set lamps each to its own selenium cell. Then you bank the cells together close and tight on a forty-foot wall somewhere away from the scene of the show to be randomly actuated.

Set the lamps themselves in watertight mountings and connect them with watertight cables (rubber'll do if it's only a one-day show, but you'll need heavy-duty lead if it's longer than that). Then you mount each lamp on an air-filled float and

dump the million lamps in the hold of a Post Office cable-layer (taking care that the leads are arranged in such a way in the hold of the ship that they'll pay out without fouling each other when you heave them over). You set sail from the misty harbour down there on the right and there's a light sea-haze. Screech of seagulls and the Postmaster General comes down to the quay to wave as you back out into the bay.

From the stern rail where you lean you can hear the ting-ting of the engine-room telegraph and there's a juddering shudder of froth from the twin propellers beneath you (keep clear of twin propellers) and the Postmaster General's waving white handkerchief recedes as the man on the bridge looks into the haze. The froth and the juddering stop. The ship slides on under its own momentum through the morning calm. Veers slowly round as someone down in its belly responds to the engine-room telegraph.

The main cable pays out over the jaws of the laying device, quietly umbilical. To the main cable is attached the network of rubber-covered wires each with its floating lamp, but they're packed neatly down in the hold waiting till the man on the bridge gives the word.

Ship swings round into the open on the lakelike flat of water and you can only just see the white houses on the shore now. It's surprising how quickly we glide. The cluster of houses is all still asleep, except for the PMG, and nobody knows we're slinking out like this. In an hour or so when the town wakes up they'll point out to each other the sudden sight of the cable-layer in the sunlit bay and they'll be surprised.

A seagull sits on the roundel of the rearmost mast, white against the blue sky.

The juddering starts again and we're under way. You can see how far we've gone by pinpointing a fleck of froth on the turbulation as it slips away behind, watching it till it's lost in the wake. Your hand on the rail feels the vibration of the engines but it's gentler now that we've got some momentum. Down there in the guts of the ship there are mechanical poundings and toings and froings and the movement is diminished with

every piece of material it passes through until it finally reaches your hand on the varnished rail.

We're right out now, and the sea-mist is clearing away as the early morning advances. Men come up from the guts and start to uncover the hatches where the million lamps are lying neatly packed. Quiet men with leathery weathery necks and their canvas shoes are quiet on the bleach of deck boards.

Ting-ting again and there's a new tone in the throb of the engine and another ting-ting and there's judder again under the deck-high bows.

Anchor splashes into the millpond. Rusty rattle of chain and the seagull flaps and wheels off.

The sun swings round in the rigging as the ship is held by the drag of the anchor and it's quiet again. Now the bustle and hurry begins and the hatches are opened and whistles are blown and winches are started and there's a good deal of shouting and the man on the bridge just watches and leans over with the sun on his white cap against the blue. There's a man standing next to him with his elbows spread on the rail and his chin on his wrists. His cap is tilted back on his head and he exchanges a word with the captain. Second mate, perhaps, or pilot.

There are few organizations in the world that can tackle the job of laying a million lamps in the middle of the bay like this but nobody on this ship regards it as anything out of the ordinary. All been carefully worked out. You can see how ingeniously the lamps with their cables have been threaded on to the main cable as it comes winching out of the hold. Each individual cable has been lightly lashed to the big one with a single loop of thread at ten-foot intervals. The main cable will anchor the whole installation on the bed of the bay allowing the lamps to intermingle freely, jostling together on the surface in their watertight floats.

As the cable is payed out the threads ingeniously dissolve in the water and the lamps bobble up on the end of their leads. You are overwhelmed with admiration for the men who have worked it out. Bowed heads over drawing boards in St. Martin's-le-Grand and telephone calls to Admiralty; top-secret

telegrams, months of planning and the men who actually man-handle the job here on the deck sworn to secrecy before their briefing in a draughty fish-market shed at four in the morning.

The lamps go down without a hitch and after three-quarters of an hour the surface of the sea is covered with them for a quarter of a mile around. (The area to be covered is larger than you'd think from the top of the cliff. From there where you're sitting the sun-splattered twinkling looks no bigger than your fist held up, but if you really want to simulate the effect electrically you've got an awful lot of water to cover when you get to it, out here in the bay.)

Creak and strain of the cabling over the sheaves. You can see the cliffs white-streaked along the edge of the saucer of sun-hazed mist and the spot on the top where the Spectator will be when the lights flash on. There's a cluster of men there now on the clifftop watching us through their binoculars, watching the frogspawn of lamps on the water. But the one who designed the whole scheme isn't with them; the Spectator. He'll be along later when everything's ready to shoot and he'll lift up a field telephone down in the grass at his elbow (pebbles under his backside in grey-green grass) and he'll give the word of command. Not there yet because he's your-twenty-four-hours-later-self and you can't be in three places at once.

The millionth lamp goes down with a dutiful cheer from the leathernecked softfeet and the man on the bridge just looks at his watch.

The lamps are all launched and they jintle and fustle in the rumpling water, crammed all tight, no room to breathe. A sighing feathering noise comes up to the deck from the shouldering nidgelling boblets. Busy little sound spread over an acre or two; somehow sad. You hadn't thought they would make a noise. You plan everything to the last hair'sbreadth but you leave an obvious thing like that out of account. Typical. They were bound to make a noise if only you'd thought. Even being rubber they'd make a noise. What about motor tyres and india rubbers? What about that? Wherever there's friction you've got

noise. Sound is friction. You get a noise even if you drop an elastic band on the dining-room floor. Take of ton of elastic bands of assorted sizes like they come in packets and spill them all out of the window and you'll get a bloody great noise. It's the scale that matters. Even feathers. Ton of feathers from the top of the leaning tower and you'd get a noise. Friction is noise. And heat, too, but the bobbling lamps are alright because they're already in the water and need no built-in chemical foam extinguisher that squirts an inward jet as the flames leap (like a man with a sore throat spraying his throat).

Shame to have overlooked the noise, though. When you get back and the men try you out with innocent-sounding funny about that bloody noise, sir, wasn't it? Somehow never thought they'd make that noise, did we, Harry? A nudge to Harry and Harry scratches himself and he chimes in with mild moonface and spurious frown: but I reckon it didn't take you by surprise, sir, eh? Note the sir. Added tacked-on to the flow of his numbskull scansion with antlike instinct. Generations of tagging a sir to the tail of the mongrel sentence. Gets ingrained like the dirt in the lines on the brown leather neck. Like don'ty'know and nichtwahr. But the sir's to soften the blow of the unspoken sneer to the man who was taken by surprise and'll wriggle out of it.

Still the lamps are afloat and we're all good fellows and the blast on the siren up by the funnel signals the fact to the sleeping shore and the sleepers are duly surprised. Final splash and the cable's down and the engines start and the deck-rail shivers. Siren-echoes reach fitfully back from unknown barriers through the wastes and the hills over the town and you look round in case somebody noticed the lift of your hand from the rail when the funnel blared. Eardrums tingle but nobody knows. Operation successful. Now the glide back to the white-walled huddle. Jolly good fellows all.

Now you've got to get the main cable that you've payed out over the stern from the town linked up to the co-axial landline from there to the cliff.

Expressionless men have worked all night in the field by the road where the brown-dressed woman came. They've set up the

cells in a fanlike scaffold and the dangling ends of the wires hang down like trails of creeper into the mud they've made by the coming and going; the jeeps and bulldozers, the shouted instructions in the night wind and the crackle of arc lamps nodding on gimbals. They've straddled the metal forty feet high and sung bawdy songs to the windy sky as they clicked up their safety hooks and swung into position. The expressionless ones are the electrical ones and they sit gathered beneath the tubular steel in a clump on their own. They speak of Faradism and galvanic superhetrodemption and make technical jokes. They've mostly been to night school. The girder-crawling belly-laughers shove noses into enamel mugs; suck up the noisy tea.

Two camps.

Day dawns and you can see the trail of men with the co-axial snailing it up the hill from the town. Nobody likes to break into activity chant because of the essential reticence of each of the men with the load. Each is stronger than the whole in stopping the spontaneous well of the singing rhythm. They content themselves with grunts and reticent glottal stops.

And when you have done all this you've got to connect up the shreds and the threads of the great co-axial each to its own appointed dangling creeper. If you rise up a few hundred feet you can see the swarm of the electro-technical experts moving forward to the oncoming cable. The black dots along the cable are the men with the glottal business. When the cable is near enough to the structure the dots move out sideways like a straggling splash and you know that they've laid it on the ground. Each black dot is rubbing its shoulder but the other dots mill round to the head of the line where the million-threaded mouth of the monster is open, fanned out in a silent roar. It has an appetite for the sinews of creeper.

Each electrician has a hundred threads to connect, each to its own appointed cell in the scaffolding. You can connect three in ten minutes, so you can see how long it'll take and how many electricians you gotter have.

You come down from three hundred feet up and you look

along the grass at the edge of the road, over the field to the scrabbly grass at the edge of the cliff out to the rippling sea and the grey-stretched mass that floats on the water.

The whole thing is quite a big operation.

Some men come by in a Post Office van and they reel out cable behind them as they make for the cliff-edge and the place where you'll be along later to give the word of command and watch the effect. In the van there's a phone but it's not like the ones you usually see. It's an old-fashioned one with brass castings and it's got a touch of rust. It rests in a cradle on a wooden box with dovetailed corners and there's a handle on the side that you turn and it'll ring down there in the town when you turn it later on as you sit with pebbles between your backside and the scrabble of grey-green grass.

Smart outspilling of men from the van and the telephone's dumped on the ground and the men run about at the double. It's all over in a matter of moments and they pile back in and the van roars back to the road. Maybe they're in a hurry to install some other field telephone somewhere. Takes years of practice.

The time for the test comes nearer. You can tell by the sudden drop in the pit of the guts.

But you didn't say it would work, remember. It wasn't you who said that. You only told them how to go about it. You said you'd plan the thing; get it organized. If they wanted to try, this was the way to try. The cable layer and everything, and the glottal men and expressionless men and the Postmaster General. So when the whole thing flops you'll make it clear you were only suggesting. Preferably get it in writing.

The object of the experiment, men, is to prove that it might be possible.

They gather round in the morning light, wiping electrification from their chins with the backs of their hands and rubbing sore shoulders so that you'll see.

The photoelectric cells are all in place.

You'd have to get fifty men to stand in front of the bank of cells with electric torches. And at the word of command they'd flash the lamps on the cells, waggling and wandering

over the surface at random, so that the cells would respond and switch on the lamps in the sea. This is the only way to get the random effect of the sparkle. It would need no training at all and they'd just stand there waggling. It's all been carefully thought out. You'd just have to give the word of command (quietly, through crankhandle telephone and down in the town the Postmaster General would throw a switch and the lights in the bay would come on). All ready for the Spectator.

With your hand on the phone, you look round at the men with lamps in their hands in a wide arc around the scaffolding. Electricians move over nearer the cliff-edge.

You glance at the Spectator who's been there sitting this long while with his chin in his hands, knees drawn up to his elbows. Didn't see him arrive. Sitting there with the sun on his hair but you can't see his face.

Spectator, are you ready? you shout into the wind, but the sound goes back to the men with the lamps who're getting impatient and talking. Spectator! A belly-shout into the sun and this time he must have heard because he raises a sunburnt arm with the flapping sleeve of blue shirt tattering in the breeze. But he doesn't look round.

Lamps, flashing at random, BEGIN.

The lamps come on from the ragged arc in front of the tubular steel and eyes go round to the smear of grey in the bay as you lift the receiver.

The phone is rusty and weighs more than it should. It is not unlike the one that the Pope uses in the Vatican but his is made of solid gold. There's a smell of damp metal in the mouthpiece. You crank the handle and a grasshopper jumps out of the grass by the dovetailed box and the Postmaster General is waiting.

Postmaster General? You get it in before he can get the initiative. The phone squeaks tinny in the damp hollow of the mouthpiece but it comes from the earpart really.

Okay to switch on?

Banal for a Postmaster General, but how else could you phrase it?

Okay to switch on. Decision and authority. You're telling him.

You leave the grasshopper and flick the sight to the bay and the lights come on. The Spectator makes an 'o' with his thumb and forefinger, little finger stuck out. The organization is perfect. Everybody has been marvellous.

The stubble of chin scrapes hard on the blue of the sweat-seeped shirt as you turn to the man who kneels by the phone behind you. His face is grey in the clifftop sunlight so you signal back that the lights in the bay are on. Bastard's been worried stiff. He tries a thin smile and carefully replaces the receiver as you turn back to watch the effect.

Pebbles are lodged in the grass beneath and the backside's tired of sitting. Stand up and stretch and look out at the electric twinkle done by kindness. Stand up and yawn but watch out for the headswim on the edge. Sudden change to standing up can do it and you're over before you've yawned if you don't watch out for the headswim. Stand up and watch the sparkle. All laid on.

Sparkle's there alright, bright as you please and damn clever too, but not so good as it'll be when the sun's out later and you'll sit on the cliff and watch the halations poppling.

You'd have to do all that and a lot more too to get the effect but it wouldn't be good enough even then. Have to go into all that detail and still it wouldn't be like this. One here, one there, now another place, never in the same place twice. A myriad angles of incidence equalling each its every angle of reflection.

Eyes narrow into the glare and the thumbs to the temples press and the sweat of the fingers locked on the brow smells good in the flash of the rippling light.

Suddenly quietly into the silver from out of the right-hand flank of the field of vision (from under the shielding hand) there curves the sliding mark of drifting boat. Surprise because you thought the bay was empty. Been watching the sparkle too long. Curves the dark mark of the slinking sliding drifter. Yacht. But the sails are black against the popple.

Unshield the brow and scatter the sight about the bay to see

whether small marks dot the sea, stealing a curving march, but no. No others. Just the one dark slinker. Sudden sight of the moving glide makes the spine taught and the ears go back like the twitch of the ears of a dog in a haunted house. Like a quick start that a sudden sound can give you in the middle of reading a book.

Incipient twitch of the ears in fear-enquiry, only the touch of the tightening nerve, but your ears go back a fraction. And your heart goes back to the jungle clearing as something strange advances and the chest hammers. Like the way they say dogs go round and round on the hearth before they curl up and snooze among the bracken and thistles that sprout unseen from the hearthrug. You get a feeling like a dog must do when a yacht sails suddenly into your patch of sparkle. Your ears go back to the jungle there with the dog in the sheepskin undergrowth.

Like the hand's jump from the varnished rail.

Against the waterglare the boat; shrivels and thins as the light bulges round from behind. Gliding into the thick of the frying water. Do you hear music, or is it just that there ought to be? Maybe there's music, but you can't hear because of the noise of the glare. When it comes out of the shimmer and into the grey of water beyond you'll be able to hear it, and listen to the yearn of the softening song. You'll be able to see what it's like, what goes on in the shell of the sliding shape. Man and a girl, he with his hand on the tiller and smoking a pipe. Girl on cushions and wearing her legs at an angle to keep the eye coming back from horizons over the bowl of the pipe and the crackle of frying saliva. That's what it'll be. Got that all figured out before the yacht unsilhouettes and goes white again in the milky sea.

The effect is known as contre-jour.

Nearly out now and the sail takes clear shape and colour so you can see that it's really white. Blobs below the boom, one where the stalk of the mast sprouts from the boat's belly, one at the end, the sawed-off end. And that's all there is in the boat, the cream boat now with pale blue paint along topsides now you

can see. The blobs are just as you thought, but too far for detail.

No music?

Must be a portable streamlined music somewhere between them or maybe she's got it beside her among the cushions, with an ulnar pronation on the sunbaked plastic. Must be. You gotter have music in cases like this. You gotter have music in plastic cases. Sail boat solitates in the wide bay. Quietly curves repeating the curve of the sweep of the edge of the bay but further out and smoothing off corners. They have lines like that in physical atlases, lines that are gentler versions of the ragged shore. Further out they get the smoother they are, the way a memory gets as you grow old. You can have a helluva lot of lines when the water troughs away from the coast and each time it gets bluer and the man in the mapping room dips his brush in a deeper wash and sniffs as he goes down a few fathoms.

Hardly a chance of fathomry here in the bay. Scarcely a line at all. Father lies further out where the lines grow tightly packed and the seagulls wheel.

Owing to the shortage of fathoms we regret to inform our customers that we must go further out.

Owing to the temporary breakdown of our button-breaking machine we regret that no further orders for laundry can be accepted at present.

Owing to ittler the fishes is littler.

Maybe they're fishing, ostensibly. Elaborate impedimenta of salty contrivance lying bollard-shadowed on the quay. She waves to him from the road above and he bends busily to the gear to prove to them both that it's fishing he meant.

Sweet deceit for both to play. She takes an intelligent interest and bends to help him untangle the threads. Man's eyes on the fall of the frock on the gentle flank but he flicks back at the scatter of angling strewn on the cobbles when her eyes come up. Two minds are fleshwise but fish is officially what they're frying. Frying tonight. Little man comes out on the pavement with a saucer of whitening into the sunshine and sploshes up FRYING TONIGHT on the window of their secret selves and

their mouths water in conjoint anticipation of frying tonight.

Boat sails out past the lonely headland disclosing the sweep of the bay and he throws over the tiller finely poised against the pull of the sail and begins the run-in for the curve of wake he'll make as he follows the curve he's caught in his mind's eye. Popple and chuckle of liquid under the uplift bow, sun on the back of neck as you make for the gaunt of the cliff but you curve out neat and heel the ship over into the curving run of the bay's embrace.

She's alarmed at the sudden tilt and eyes go anxious but you smile over the charred pipe and then she's relaxed. And her mind goes back to the frying tonight. Secretly.

But you share her secret, knowing you both know why you've come. Secretly.

Blood moves in the loins and her hand moves the plastic knob of the plastic box. Slender hands, all milky, finger-tipping the music out of the grille of the box. Seabreeze laps at the hair and the hem of the frock and the hand goes from one to the other as the music wells and is caught in the curve of resonance made by the sail that flutters and cracks to every gust.

Empty sea and forgotten foreshore stretch all around in the sunshine. Her smile as she pretends to catch sudden sight of you makes the honey of the music smoother, more significant.

You look alright, too, with white of your shirt against the sky and the pipe in even teeth, lines from the nostril's wings to the sides of the muscle-taut mouth.

Eye roves round the lapping of green at the top of the cliff. The white of cumulus rears behind like a bunch of spectators craning at an accident but there's nobody about; that's all that matters. Nobody to watch the fools you'll make of each other when you splash out the anchor in a minute or two. When the poppling under the boards will be close to your ear and the smell of her hair on the cushions.

Eye roves round but there's nobody there.

Smudge of blue pops out from the bellying sail on the cliff

behind. Smudge of blue on the trim of the top of the cliff. A man sitting.

There's somebody there.

In all the wide space of the private bay there's somebody sitting, a focal point of annoyance to grate on the smooth of the moment. Better tell her so that she'll know why you don't heave to in the apparently private world of breeze.

Wait till the breathing is quiet again and then suddenly motion; a masculine grasp of the pipe and a nod to the cliff, all casual.

Peeping Tom. You smile at her and she looks round over her shoulder frowning nicely.

She spots the blue of the shirt and smiles guiltily back from under her eyebrows, smooth brow with hair a-flutter. As she turns, the twist of the body drags the frock and it hangs in a curving trail from the boards to the knee, leaving an intimate wedge of luminous shadow and you can't quite keep your eyes on hers as she looks back at you from the cushions. Delicious drapery accident that drags your eyes down into the cool shadow and the private offering of female.

Flick the eye back to the clifftop and the still Spectator. Too far to see him clearly, only a blob of pink above the shirt and bare forearms up from the knees to the eyes, shielding the light.

Can't see him so he can't see you. And he's looking into the sun, too, which makes it almost impossible. Go on as though nothing had happened. Disregard the fester of irk from the clifftop. Can't see him so he can't see you. No detail.

You look down at her, avoiding the magnet of the opening skirt, but she's not so sure. She wants to pull out of the bay away from the stranger, out to the wheeling seagulls where you can get on with it without worrying.

Gravity drops the eyes to the sex-point under the skirt and the belly stirs and the sides of the neck are full with mounting pulse. Drag away the glance and look at the varnished boards to prove that it was really the boards you were watching and look up suddenly and smile.

Smile comes back from the sprawl of woman and music and cushions and the sun warms from a new quarter as you rear the boat round and aim for the open horizon. Your mouth has hopefully watered; saliva crackles in the bowl of the pipe.

Cliffs sway now above the bows and she watches the rise and fall of the stranger receding as the speed of the chuckle of water increases. Blueshirt sinks to pinpoint over the shoulder of tiller-man.

Cushions are warm beneath the spread of the full wide hips but the small of the back is acheful where you lean on nothing and the radio takes the weight on the naked point of elbow. Brassière straps are tightening into the shoulders but you mustn't shift because of the picture you make for the man who has brought you fishing. Hair in the breeze flops into the eye but it would be too elaborate to get out everything and start combing the hair in the mirror and that would lead to doing lips and powdering and so on and this is not the moment. Some people have a sense of the wrong and the right moment that's sort of dictated by dramatic requirements of any given situation. He's thinking of starting something once the shirt on the cliffs is gone. Any abrupt move from the cushioning would take his mind off the whole affair. Distract him. Once they start getting spellbound it's better to let the thing develop without shifting the point of attention. Like not making a sudden movement in the presence of a baby newly asleep. How do you know he's thinking of starting something? Well, it's been in his mind since the huddle of fishing things there on the shore and the sunshine showed through the thin of the skirt. Or even since earlier. Maybe since the first meeting. Back of his mind.

Saying Peeping Tom like that was clear enough. You should have protested at the implication as soon as he said it but it had to be something quick and smart and you can't always phrase these things in a hurry especially with the damn thing wanting to tip over at any moment and God knows what a mess you'd look as he draggled you back over the side and the salt water spouting out of your mouth and the sea in your ears. Frock would shrink in spite of the label. Sandals asquelch and rat-

tailed hair and cling of the damp white silk on shivering stomach. Spell all broken and radio gurgling its love songs into the deep. Hateful.

Looks quite good against the sky, like a man should with the shirt collar up against his brown neck and pipe smoking itself in the wind. If you look quickly you can see a suggestion of man-shape under the trousers in the crucial place because the legs are disposed askew and you can't help noticing it really even though there's such a lot of landscape to look at and white clouds over the cliff. How they manage to go about with all that exterior fitting and not realize that a woman——

You've contrived the whole thing well, though, you've got him at the right pitch at the right moment, all without being in the least infra dig and he doesn't realize you had it all worked out. His elaborate deception with the fishing business fooled him nicely and lets you out of all official responsibility. You are unsuspecting and hadn't any idea. When it comes to the point you'll battle as you should, contesting the force of his thick arms and you'll both see the charm of your puny resistance and succumb to the need to submit. Here in the bottom of the boat.

Stretch with a new pulsation, feel the sun on the body through the linen (non-shrink) and there's a gentle draught of breeze on the thighs so you can tell without looking there's more showing than should though you snatch the skirt over the knee with an apparently involuntary movement from time to time and it makes no difference to what he can see if he looks. Better not see what his eyes are up to; fix the stare on something neutral to give him a chance. He'd be abashed if he saw that you saw he was looking and you'd have to be insulted too. It would take time to get through all that lot and he'd probably go off the boil and perhaps start fishing even and you'd have to leave the whole thing till another day. Furious. No agony sharper than the strain of the yearn of the warm thighs unrequited, of the mounting breathless need to be crushed, rhythmically riven in the swaying shell of the poppling boards—all that to tail off hopelessly, mock-frigidly silent. Keep to the

simple plan of the neutral gaze or the eyes half-closed. Don't shift or turn or solace the aching spine with furtive twist or destroy the unnoticed leg-formation lest the fierce arousal unforthcome.

Forthcome from the crucial point that's under the clean-cut chin and the buttoned shirt; under the belt and between the pockets. From the sides you could enter the gaping pockets, slip hands quickly in for the sudden shock of the male. Quite out of the question. Mean getting up in apparently cold blood from the cushions here with no excuse for approaching other than lust for the proximation. Leave it till both have abandoned the play of unconcern. The moment comes. It always comes. Unconcern will vanish when he gives the unspoken word. He'll leave the tiller for some good reason stumbling forward up to the sharp end and you'll look up at his face in surprise as he looks down from above the brown trousers. Look of surprise is imperative. He'll have tied up the sail or whatever they do and the boat will lap in the rhythmic sea or maybe carry on scudding away from the shore for as long as it takes but you can hardly be expected to worry about that. Blueshirt on the cliff hardly in sight now as the cliff goes up and down on the skyline, crazily swooping. Blueshirt solitary sitting on the silly cliff with the clouds behind, nothing but the breeze from the sea to disturb *his* crucial point.

Keep your eyes on blueshirt.

She kept her eyes on the blue horize on.

The draught is there on the thighs and a seagull wheels and flutters on to the rearing masthead, white against the blue. You're quite ready for the taking now, thank you very much. All done by psychology and chemical things have been brewing up under the reeling sky with the fisherman looking up your leg and the eye on blueshirt who must be feeling right out of things now, but the eye is the link. The clouds gather up on the clifftop like a crowd come to watch, like ears of corn in a waving field, like people watching an accident. Not long now before the ambulance clangs down the milky way and you wake and say you've been reaped.

Yacht swings round as it comes out of the glare, right-angling so that you see the boom swing over, inexpertly lurching and it makes for a course to the open sea. You can hear the music now the distraction of shimmer is over, honey-coloured melody curling out of the bay. There's a wash from the stern that came from the sudden swing and it rests reminiscently on top of the water even though the yacht's away. Swirls and popples to itself with a flecking of froth and steals a fragment of sparkle from the central patch.

Yacht moves diminishing under the cup of the cupped left hand, blobs unclear but the blob at the back moves up to the blob in the middle and covers the sound of the music. Muffled music fades as the shape slips slender under the dark of the hand and into the warm beyond.

The cup of the hands were the top of the screen, the wrists were the sides, and the shore was the bottom. The shape came darkly into the shimmer, unexpected. Somebody else's afternoon serened across the screen, centrewards; changing its mind it swung up to the left-hand corner. Now, if you disentangle the fingers you'll see the whole of the bay and the tiny mark that moves past the spillage of rocks at the headland, off to some other bay.

Hands cramped with the folding over the forehead, knuckles shining white and damp, you can still feel the pressure of thumbs to temple and the remnant of touch of finger to hairline.

Stretch out, palms out, to cover the sun, shoulders hunched, back tight, yawn into the sky and listen to the grasshoppers. Funny how the yacht crept in unnoticed, out of the wide sea. You'd think you'd see everything from a point like this, wouldn't be a chance for stealthy watercreeping. Range the bay for other stealth. Mark it off into mental squares and do the thing systematically. Can't be caught on the hop again.

The yacht sailing in square five is off to some other bloody bay.

All other squares appear to be vacant, but there's a chance that you're not making the squares small enough. Smaller the

square the more efficient the system. It's the yachts that hide *between* the squares that matter. You've gotter thread the whole field of vision with a network of filaments. Like the thing they have in telescopes. There's a name for that. A fine crisscross you get in the lens for centreing up the image. Can't think. Something to do with a spider's web. With a set-up like that you couldn't go wrong, but you'd have to lay the network in a horizontal plane like the plane of the sea. Then you'd get the squares tapering off in size to infinity, all the vertical lines converging on what she kept her eyes-on.

Shaft out the sight down over the rolling green to search for a speck of life on the cliffs. Nothing moving anywhere. Nothing but maybe a bird but they don't count. Headland clearer now and you can see that it really is linked with the earth beneath the backside. It's one continuous sweeping swing of landmass. From the point beneath the trousered anus molecules stretch in orderly confusion, each locked to the other in jam-packed mass, jig-sawed together in vain repetition till they spill in the sea at the distant point. All touching together in endless union, all shimmering in tiny vibration because of the heat from the sky.

Molecular activity is induced by heat.

Heat is induced by molecular activity.

One of those must be wrong.

Unless it's truth by accident, obvious Einstein paradox. Continuous time, perpetual motion; vicious spiral eating its tail. Heat shakes atom, but shaking is heat; therefore heat creates heat. *Quod est disputandum.*

There's a helluva lotta grasshoppers on this cliff. Attend carefully and you can isolate one of them from among the many. From out of the universal buzz of grasshoppers you can pick on one like you can sometimes in a restaurant when everybody's talking and close your eyes and it doesn't make sense—just a jumble. But look at somebody, pick one out of the crowd and you can follow what he's saying. You have to separate the noise from all the rest. Maybe lip-reading has something to do with it, subconsciously, but by and large it's a question of filtering away the extraneous hubble of conversation so that only one voice stands out.

Millions of grasshoppers chatting away and you pick one out and concentrate. No seeable living or moving thing but there's a billion bloody grasshoppers screaming their heads off all round.

Turn down the face to the grass so that the green reflects into your cheeks (you can see the greenishness tinting the fine hairs out of focus on the tingling cheeks) and in the shadow of yourself on the grass there's the fragile buzz but you can't see him. Tucked under a blade of grass. Do it with their legs, or wings or something. Kind of saw-tooth edge that they scrape together like mad to encourage the others. Each to the other over the mountainous grassblades calls, scraping away till you'd think their little scrapers would wear out. Must have some means of lubrication to keep the thing in working order. Close to the grey grass now, and the sound stops but the other three million all go on without him. The triangle player in the symphony orchestra has gone home with a nervous breakdown but the conductor doesn't notice.

A quick hop and something flips out of the line of view and you've had your grasshopper. Find another. Wherever you listen they're everywhere. Get up and find one. Invisible hum in the grass to be tracked down and watched. Get up steady because of the rush of the swim to the head on the edge. Nice and easy and walk about a bit quietly so that they don't all go dead in a panic. Walk into a circle of silent grass everywhere you go. Millions of scrapings all over, but you're surrounded by an eight-foot radius of silence. See you coming. *Hear* you coming? Squat down quiet in the grass and it starts all over again quite close. Wait with the sun on the back of the head and trouser knees in the dusty earth between the grass, the breeze roaring from behind in your ears.

Hop. And you nearly saw one, saw the tail-end of the leap like the trace of the curve of the point of light that flips across an oscilloscope. Dies out as you look.

Another one but out of the tail of the eye. They hop like

hell. You gotter be pretty quick. Go back now to the edge and look down to the sand and the rocks on the shore. Have a look at what gives. Be nothing you bet, like all the afternoon except for the yacht. You want to get back to the edge because you don't know why but it's like a cat comes home after nights on the tiles, you've given yourself a seat there in the grass and this stuff's all rough and it's good to sit out over the world and look out seeing that there's nothing going on. Like a bull in the ring has a *querencia*, a spot he chooses for himself at some random point to which he'll try to return after the clash of *torero*. Wants to get back there for some unapprehended reason, some rudimentary urging that creaks over in his heavy mind, telling him to get back and start again. Doesn't know why.

After a brilliant *pase de pecho* in which the *torero* asserted unquestioned authority over the grasshopper, he returned to his *querencia* at the edge of the ring and sat down on the *barrera*. The ovation was unprecedented.

Three million grasshoppers go on sawing but you go back to the rounded impression in the grass where you can put the backside good and firm on the edge. The grass is greyer where you've been sitting. No trouble about finding it. You could have checked anyhow, because the long thin gap in the tumble of rock on the left closes up if you move the head to the left a fraction. To the right it opens too wide. You can get such a fine adjustment that you can see the gap with one eye and not with the other, because of orbital separation. So you could have found the place again even if the pressed-out bottom in the grass had vanished.

But it's there and such a faithful representation of your bottom that you could get some plaster of Paris and pour it into the grassy declivity (twin saucers because of the orbital separation) and you'd hardly know the difference when you took the solid plaster out. Except that you'd get the texture of grass matted into the surface and it would look like a stone-age bottom.

Ars grassier artis.

Before replacing your backside please see that there are no

grasshoppers as mistakes cannot afterwards be rectified. Nothing to see and no noise of sawing legs or wings or whatever they saw but that doesn't mean there's no grasshopper. Waiting under a blade of crunched-up green in the shadow of a straw waiting for the mammoth backside to loom out of the sky like an eclipse and crush the living daylights out. Waiting to puncture the tautened trousers stretched on the unsuspecting backside, to administer last-minute reproof to the crushing dome as the light darkens out. Better brush off the back of the pants before replacing the dome in case of sudden death in a grasshopper afternoon.

You wiggle yourself back into the perfect fit on the edge of grass with the legs dangling over the side, heels in the chalk of the face of the cliff. No sudden pang from the backside. No dying remonstration through the hopsack. Your heels find the grooves, semi-circular that they've made in the powdering chalk and chalk dusts away from the undercalf cliff where the rub of the trousers dislodges the white and it falls in the turn-ups. Wiggle your feet and there's chalk in the shoes in the sunshine over the edge.

The edge of the cliff sheers up at an angle before it breaks off in sudden space, so your body tilts back to the land—safe from the draw of the beach below and the rocks and the grains of sand. Smooth round rocks and crystallized jaglets of myriad sand. Better the jaglets for a fall if you've got to. They're aerated with plenty of room between the chinks of jags for the sudden densification that packs them tight as the body falls. Rocks are smooth but no aeration; no room for packing and the brains are spattered around the curve of the beach in a star-shaped splash, scuddering along the sand till the force of the first explosion dies and they lie and wink with the sun on human juices in the summer afternoon. There's a scatter of brainshell and blood-browned hair like an over-enthusiastic hit at a coconut shy. The body's about somewhere, lying in shredded sprawls in the shade of the rocks but it's the head that matters because that's where the initiative lies and the Seat of Learning. The mechanics of mystery and imagination shockingly

dismantled and splashed about. In the writhe of demented brain-cell there still flit tangled thoughts that started as you fell with the wind of the drop roaring in your mouth and the startled urine warming the trousers. Thoughts that can't work themselves out or come to any reasonable conclusion because the nerve-endings have been wrenched and certain vital chemicals have been spilt in the starshaped explosion of head and rock. Even though death took place instantaneously there's still a little brainwork left over, like a flywheel when you switch off the motor or the way a chicken will run round the yard after you've cut off its head. Disjointed brain lies reasonless in the sand thinking with its dying momentum, surprised and a little resentful. Life hangs over the scene of the fall like an aura, over the dismemberment.

Like what happens when a printer's apprentice spills out the type from a half-locked forme. There's a page of commonsense spewed on the composing-room floor and as you go down on your knees to the muddle of lead you can see a letter or two here and there that make sense, a wadge of italics, perhaps, that somehow remained intact in the arc of the sweep to the floor. A syllable here, two words together even, but hopeless now. As you look from your overalled knees you've got the page in your mind's eye, all neat and ready as it was a moment ago, and here it is in a piggledy pattern. The commonsense of sum total clings to the mess and the pathetic insistence of still-legible fragments makes you scatter the mixture irrevocably, puddling it round with your finger. Extinguish the last left-over of life. Put it out of its misery. Embarrassing wordlets are gone now you've stirred with your finger; all life is extinct. You're left with only anger at the sudden mischance that made chaos out of order.

It is regretted that this chaos is out of order.

That's what it's like when you spill your brain from its half-locked forme all over the smooth of a rock in the sea wind. It'll say fragmentary things to itself surprisedly until it's disturbed by dustpan and brush or the cool shock and swirl of sea as the tide comes up.

Or perhaps there's residual warmth; that endows it with the tail-end of thinkfulness, the pent-up warmth of a lifetime's generating there within the encasement of the now-matted coconut shell. Maybe it's only as it grows cold that the rudimentation of thinking stops. Slows to a gentle wheeze of consciousness. Punctuated by racking obscenities of regurgitation as memories shiver it momentarily back to awareness and it becomes a degree or so warmer in the chilling air.

The shock of the swirl of the incoming sea is what stops it once and for all. A matter of temperature. You can kill bacteria with the sudden shock of fahrenheit descending; brains too, probably. Even when they're all locked up neat and tidy they go sluggish on a frosty morning. It's heat that does it. You gotter have heat.

You lie rough-chunked in your several portions in splotches over the sand and the mind goes on in a buzz like a haze of mosquitoes at some crucial airborne centre of gravity over the straggle of red on the shore. You reminisce in a woofly daze, trying to recall the recent fall and the scream as you plunged and the tear and drag of the yielding grass as you clung for the last earth-moment to the fringe of the cliff and the sudden well of the warm-wet patch as the rocks rushed up, all round and smooth in the drying light of somebody else's afternoon. But it's all mixed up and the harder you try to untangle the details the more woofly it gets, like the diminishing return of the effort of dream recollection. You eventually tire of putting the fresh past together again and the mind goes on in the musing muzz of the buzz of mosquito cloud.

The day goes on and the mind goes gentler (because of the fall in the temperature) and when evening comes there's a sudden arrival of men with shovels and brooms.

Poor bugger threw hisself off the top.

The buzz comes to in a final effort to tell them what really happened but the mouth is still and parched in the grit of the sand. The familiar mouth is disconnected from the central buzz that lingers over the scene of the crash and there's saltwater trickling in at the lips.

Wet his pants on the way down, too.

The still thing is prodded with broom-bristle but you don't feel a thing because of the disconnection. Not long now before they disturb the buzz-cloud, dispersing the thought in dilution with the air. In fine, multiple dilution (like homeopathy) so that you'll interlace the atmosphere with tenuous shreds of last-minute thinking, spiralling happily on the wind for ever. Ever more diluted as eddying gusts waft and intermingle in the sky. Dilution and calm where it's no longer necessary or even worth the effort to try to tell them what really happened. Who cares if you wet your worldly pants on the worldly way down?

That's how haunting happens, probably. When by some trick of the atmosphere the separate threads of somebody's death-thought converge and reconstitute and some still-living thought-box tunes in to the wavelength. That's how spookies are born. Million to one chance that it ever happens, though, that the turbulent ebb and swell of the atmosphere should re-unite the wandering haze-trails. That's why you get so few spookies. A matter of mathematics, really, like the two bees furiously buzzing all over the Mediterranean and never meeting in a thousand years.

The gradual lull of the haze of thought dies away slowly and it's just like falling asleep or falling awake, no pain. The pain is when you are in the middle of the fling-armed straddling fall, a clutch of grey-green grass in the hand and the shower of chalk from the top that follows you down and you scream into the descent and gravity leaps up in your face. And the rocks are the coming target like a bold full stop at the end of a string of italics. A graze on your arm and a rent in the flapping sleeve where you scraped in a desperate grab at the hanging cliff but it'll never heal up because of the blinding crunch of the spread-eagle flail of fragile you on the smiling rocks. Don't worry about the slit in the arm and the shirt, just look down with eye-brows up in surprise and gaping mouth and a shrill of thoughts in the back of the head that's going to be splashed on the smiling rocks.

You lean back far in the grass seat (legs still dangle, but

they're firmly attached; no danger of their going). You lean back far because of the breathless thinking and you lean flat out on the grass with the arms spread out to grip the ground. Shoulder blades press the earth and the hair at the back of the head is dusting into the dust of the chalky ground but there's no danger like this with your body clamped tight to the certain earth. Open the eyes to the flying clouds and feel the beat of the warm heart of the reassuring earth beneath the shoulder blades. No danger here. Blood in the body flows to new places with the change of position; belly flattens, gluteus maximus relieved of the aching pressure. Blood throbs now in the neck and the loins. Raise the head with the hands at the back and you can hear the nostrils quietly snorting as you look along the chest and loins and knees and out to the sealine over beyond the invisible sparkle. No danger. Because of the tilt of the cliff at the edge (the way they have some station platforms to stop you wandering over the edge) your knees are high and your head is low. Sawed-off knees because of the dangling feet and there's the mound of radicle between the points of the forward pelvis. Shirt button gleams and the upper lip glints with a point of sweat. Out of focus and close and soft. The mound lies still between the hips, a lumpiness under the rumple and ruckle of trouser slit.

There are no flies on me.

Over the hips there's only one thickness of material (pockets, though, but they're thin) and over the languid radicle four (or is it six?). You've gotter count the hemming and the odd bits of lining and the doubling up where the buttons go, so it must be six and then there's the buttons too to add to the ruckle and indistinction. Hot. Air blows in a bit but it's hot and you shift over the central bunching of ruckle and radicle, freeing the tightness from anus to navel. Easier; but you can feel the cold of the damp of the sweat.

Hands interlocked behind the head to take the strain of the neck muscles and you can smell the smell of the pallium under the nostrils and feel the universal pulse of the head and neck (somehow out of step with the glinting jump of the shirt button

that takes its time from the heart-throb). But it's all part of the same outfit. Pumping pulse of head and wrist and heart. And all absolutely automatic. Just switch on and let it run. Lasts a lifetime. No deception whatsoever.

Alternate the bumping of the heels against the face of the chalk in the grooves they've worn for themselves and you coincide with the rhythm of the shirt button. Sound is transmitted through the chalk to the shoulder blades, tiny impulses of movement through the chalk like the ship had, each particle of moleculated crustacean fossil tapping its neighbour on the shoulder as they stand packed together in the body of the cliff. Tap on the shoulder. Pass it on! Tap on the shoulder. Pass it on! All the way up to the shoulder blades. A tremulous movement small as the blink of a grasshopper's eye through the ground to the ear. Increase the weight of the kick to the chalk with the heels and the sound is deeper, richer. Movement multiplied by the strength of the heel kick. Must be quite a spray of chalk coming from the grooves of tapping in the face of the cliff.

Head lies back in the hands and the eyes open up on the race of the chasing clouds. Endless succession of floating fluff coming in from the glittering sea, importantly hurrying each an allotted distance behind the other, keeping its place in the racing convoy. Sky-borne procession in the roaring blue. You'd never think they were floating so fast, not if you just glanced up, but when you lie back on the flat of the shoulder blades, white of the elbows out to the sun, you can see the silent streaming scud of fluffs. There's a stratification, too. The higher ones move slowly and the closer ones go by at a helluva soundless lick. Three layers. Top dogs take it nice and easy and the lower they get the licker. Like telegraph poles stream past your carriage window in a smeary wipe and those in the distance dignified and stately. Illusory difference. Perspective of movement.

Sunburnt brown of the arms is cool to the grass beneath the speed of the clouds and the white part that the sun never sees is upward now. You get the same thing sometimes when you turn over a stone and there's a frightened whiteness of creeping

root that's never been suntouched. The white of the arms is white because of the hang of the arm to the side, because of the airless sunless touch of the muscleless bone to the sweat of the thorax. Like the palms of the hands that shrink from sunshine, whitely clasping. Negroes have that, white palms, no matter how black they are. Never seen the soles of the negro feet. What about the feet?

The sky flows by and carries the following eye always up to the eyelids. Then you flick to the one that comes in fresh and the eyes go slowly up to follow. Eyes turn up slowly and flick down quick like the eyes of a negro praying.

Back in ten minutes. Gone to lynch.

Streaming fluffs careening over and the speed seems quicker and quicker. Or is the earth moving? The earth is moving, O God, it's helterskeltering quietly out to sea and the tap of the heels in the white of the cliff will dislodge the wedge of the fringe of cliff here under the panicking shoulders and you've gotter hang on to the clumps of grass and still the tapping shoes. Stop the tremulous move of the ranks of molecules; stop the insidious fission that's opening out beneath where the land is cracking away from the mothercliff. You can start a landslide with a pebble and they get avalanches in Switzerland just by shouting or even coughing too loud so shut up quiet and stop the tapping away of the woodpecker feet; close the eyes and hang on quiet till the panic stops. But you can sense the fierce flight of the clouds through the yellow lids and the cliff is streaming forward into the sea.

Get up quick in a scuffle of hurry and move away from the edge with the heart going hard. Get away from the flying edge. Headswim swirls but hurry away. Get back to the motionless landscape behind. Away from the edge and balance comes back and you stand astride like a man in a coracle in case of the sudden swamping lurch. You're a bloody fool to stand astride in the middle of the grass on the lonely cliff with your elbows out and fingers taut.

The entire effect was purely psychological.

But none the less galvanizing.

Galvanism is what you do to frogs to prove they've got muscles. Nothing to do with clouds. You can do it in the laboratory. They jerk suddenly.

Calvinism. That's what you do to men to prove they've got souls. You can do it in church. Their souls are white like the whites of your eyes and the sunless underside of clammy arms. No jerking.

Nobody saw you do it and the landscape has stopped its rocking. Firm as a rock. No rocking now, just rock with bloody fool stamped all the way through.

If they send you up in a plane and a wing comes off or the azimuth seizes up they send you up again on the spot to prove that you haven't lost your nerve. If they didn't you'd never go up again and have to be drummed out so you go on up and get the schütz-ab all over again but it's better when you've done it and you can look them all in the face again. So can they.

So back to the edge again quietly while the heart's still floundering and the wrists athump. Get back the breathing to the regulation in out on guard and take it nice and easy up to the edge; up to the *grassier artis* on the hair-raising edge, moving calmly through the grasshopper circle of silence that goes where you go if only you stop to listen.

Nobody saw you.

Azimuth comes from the Arabic. You get a lot of Arabic. There's tariff and algebra and probably zodiac and Gibraltar and admiral and a helluva lot. You wouldn't guess when the local printer punches out tariff at the top of the menu that he's gotter few generations of dancing girls looking over his braces. Unheard clash of Arabic music playing over his frowsty head as he peers with his steel-rimmed gaze at the over-inked impression. The wandering whine, the lilt and splash of some tortuous casbah, there in the Old Kent Road.

The whole thing was over in a second or so and nobody saw your craven rush for safety.

So gingerly now to the well-worn impress, thinking of as much else as you can, all disregardant and noncaliente.

Azimuth is Arabic for horizon, probably, which is reason-

able when you think of all that desert and hardly a palm-tree to take your mind off the azimuth. And you think of the lustring black of the arch of the desert night and camels snore and raise their private whirlwinds round the dusty nostril under the vaulted zenith.

There goes another one; zenith.

And nadir. Gentlemen, we are most of us sitting on a nadir. No sting.

All the words of the scratch of the stick on Eastern sands, the huddle of shrouded figures that sit round a pot of astronomer's brew, heavening out equations and speaking casually of apogee.

You'd never think that seconds ago the cliff flew forward into the sea, smoothly wrenched from the background landscape as you looked at the clouds. Wouldn't think that the whole earth melted away, uncertainly like the sudden slide of snow from a steaming roof. Quite still now, though. Quite calm. Solid beneath. No need for the dig of nails to the grey grass roots.

Effect was produced by the skyblown rush of the sailing fluffs, steadily over your head. Felt you were swept in a heart-burst sweep outwards into the bay. You interpreted the move of the clouds as movement here on chalk. They were still and you were careening. Same thing happens sometimes when your train stands in the station waiting to shove off and the train on the opposite track starts moving and you think you've pulled out until you notice the paper stall's unmoving flick through the passing windows. Nobody else in the carriage senses your crestfall as you readjust to the waiting position. The other train's gone and we're still standing.

Relative movement. Like when you get two trains clanking and rattling over a neck-and-neck stretch and you gather speed and the other lot seem to be sliding backwards. You get the crestfall effect, too; on the faces that turn to you in the windows across the way as they slide slowly back and are lost. Subtle expression that takes an expert to notice, but you get it alright. They wanted you to be pounding along standing

still. That's the kind of thing it was. Illusory contrary movement.

But all calm now and they blow over according to plan. Crestfall still lingers, though, in spite of nobody saw you.

(There's always yourself looking at you in your scurry away from the slipping brink.)

You can look down again now, and batter away at the chalk with the whitening heels. Thump with a great courage. You'd have plenty of warning if anything really started, a creaking and crunching and a slow rumbling in ponderous overture. You'd just rise quietly and look at the widening rifts, step lightly across to the mainland turning to watch with your hands in your pockets, watching the way the chalk bounced down.

Suddenly a grasshopper into the vision, bang into the centre of a fringing clump. Grasshopping unfrightened right up to the curving sweep of the bay's high wall. If you had the guts of a grasshopper you too would scratch your toothedged legs together and preen yourself in the sun. In the grass by the trouser knee there's a new expectant silence that sits and waits for the spindly shrill of brilliant friction and you turn the head carefully round with the hands all taut and look into the forest of blades where the great hop landed. Gently a blade shivers in the air but nothing's disclosed in the cool heart of the reedy shadows. If you keep quite still under the flow of clouds without so much as a gulp of welling saliva there'll be a sudden noise from the secret green and your eyes'll flick to the nub of the sound. You'll be able to see the thrilling of the legs together and the diligent gaze of the grasshopper eye. One of the fragments of blading spikes will show up as a fleck of urgent insect and you'll wonder why you missed it, there in the tangle.

No sound or move but you can hear the rest of the orchestra over behind and the sound of the rushing air in the concave cliff and the fiddle and languor of waveling washes that swash the shore in spasmodic rushes. (The waves, they was fiddlin' and small.)

No sound; only the high-pitched scream of the sky-blue heaven waiting in the burning light for the chirrup of one

particular grasshopper. Unaware grasshopper shaded under the jungle of shafting green.

Patchwork of grass-shade spatters the sandy white of the hide you've found and the great green shafts go nodding up to the outside blue. Noise from the jostling tangle of rough-hewn blades. Shifts and surges from side to side of the shielded glade. Your head is still but the eyes swirl round each separately and you can alternate your attention between the two or fuse them into a mingled image of grass and blue or ahead and backwards. You hold quite still and the textured strands go roaring high, hurling and beating in the moving air. But you wait for the fragile touch of the sandfelt impulse, wait for the bump of the ground to the slendering foot. You wait. Wait for the upward thud of the ground and the terrible nearness of lumbering vasts. Listen to the call sign busy above the jungling spiretops.

You wait and you watch the wavering grass and no sound screaks from the tiny shadows. You wait for the fragile touch of the screak to the ear and the sudden parabola.

Wait and the grass importantly grows a millimetre or two as you watch, grows as the beard on the face of a man will grow, unobserved, while you stand on the street corner talking. A stubble of millimetres quietly pushing its way, warm to the sharp air; tomorrow's shave coming up for the kill. Sometimes you can feel the sudden surge of the stubble. Sometimes in the evening you'll get a scrittle of tingling chins and needles and you rub it easy with the back of the hand. Comes through in concerted rushes while you're thinking of something else or busy with a night's dreaming. Same as the fingernails. But you can't feel the thrust of the growing nail like you can the beard. Like you can the darkening prickling jaw. Like the cliff can feel the tiny tickle of grey-green grass that thrusts and whiffles in the outside breeze.

As you wait for the clump to spew its expected curve of grasshopper trajectory you sit on your backside watching the grass grow but it's terribly hard to see the slightest difference between now and two minutes ago. Now and two minutes agrow. Expanding clump in a humming universe conceals a

nub of surprise in the depth of the growing green and a spider distracts the eye from the focussed unseen nub and waddles over the hummock of trousered knee. If you look at the waddler you'll miss the jump but he's making fast for the central chine that runs from the knees to the flies and if your eye's on the clump you'll miss the sudden skedaddle within the gaping gate of the ruckling flies and he'll be all mixed up in the forest beneath and mighty surprised at the dark damp warmth. And you'll have to practically take your trousers off to get him out alive. Quietly quickly round to the crease of the belly the hand pulls the pants tight over the scroted ruckle, flattens the gape of the button-spaced flies and the spider's locked out and can ramble unwatched.

Graticle, that was the word. Said the spider to the flies. What they have in the lenses of telescopes. Or is it graticule? A handy spider for my lady's graticule. A great big spider sat down beside her and disappeared up my lady's telescope, there to deposit a graticle. She didn't think anything of it at the time, but when it was born she was terribly surprised.

Spider scurries over the taut-drawn flies (you don't feel a thing) and up the crest of the pocketed hip. There's a graticle-streak as he makes the descent from the pocket's hem and flurries off into the undergrass. Gulliver-tied by a strand to a grass-blade you turn the eye back to the clump you've neglected. No movement. The price of vigilance is a pain in the neck, and the clump stands silent. There never was a bloody grasshopper there at all. Abandon the vigilance, loosen the neck, resettle the numbing backside and light a cigarette.

Cigarettes in the back trousers pocket all squashed now from when you lay flat but the hand goes round and you haunch over on one hip to get at the pocket.

Swift curve

of the long-hoped jump straight from the heart of the very clump, the spinney of grass where it lurked. Long low curve and holy God it's gone over the edge, over the bloody edge, hopped over the bloody edge in a screaming drop. Bunch yourself up in a neck-tight wait, wait for the end of the fall and the

great full stop; wait for the great full stop, O foolish grasshopping screaker. Scatter your insect brain on the warm rocks, but they're so small that nobody'll know and the rest of the orchestra here behind'll not give a damn or even know that you've gone. Must have been surprised when the maw of the air yawned wide and the shore came up.

Maybe they can fly, though; maybe unsuspected wings unfurled for the sudden emergency. Like Darwin said, and he just fluttered off, all casual-like when he realized his mistake?

But Darwin said it took three billion years to grow wings for a sudden emergency like hopping off the edge of a cliff, each generation flinging itself from the top until the terror began to bring out prickles of embryo wingpoints as they fell. By the time the two millionth had trundled over the prickles had turned into wings but they only flapped in the downward sweep like dead things. The grasshoppers had to learn to use them but the distance between the top of the cliff and the bottom was so short that the little bastards had hardly a chance, when you remember that they were smashed to pieces at the bottom and the knowledge acquired had to be transmitted back to unborn generations up at the top. Adaptation is a slow process and you've gotter use up a helluva lot of grasshoppers, but you win out in the end and the grasshopper just flies back on to the cliff again on the three million and first occasion. Maybe this was it, the three million and first, but you didn't spot anything changing its mind and zooming back.

It was there all the time in the grass, silently sitting. Committed suicide to prove it.

The packet is crushed by the weight of the body but there are plenty left and you can straighten out the one you choose. Look almost like new by the time you've moulded it back into cigarette shape.

The circulation is bumping under the soft of the knees and the water-sparkle goes on as though sudden death had not just flicked from the fringing grass and the sweep of the yellowing sand lies flat in the sunlight dreaming of a spatter of brains.

It droppeth like the gentle brains from heaven upon the

place beneath. Twice messed, it messeth him that falls and him that sweeps it up. But it doesn't amount to much with grasshoppers.

Lighter flicks out in the breeze each time. Cupping hand and the cowering shield of the chest imperfect screen to the filtering breeze. Cheek-flesh waits for the lighter's flame and the anxious drag of air-cooled smoke but the sparks fly out all wasted. Screw round away from the airway into the shadow but the breeze comes round and buttons up behind and the thumb gets tired in the clicking. You snatch at the coat lapel to go inside and under out of the wind but there's no coat, only the blue of shirt so glinting button undone and in you go with cigarette, lighter and thumb. Sun comes through the blue and the nipple is brown and surprising and the lighter flares at the first request and you'll catch your bloody self on fire if you don't watch out.

Nipple's been there the whole afternoon, gazing out to sea through the shirt, steadfastly pointing.

Cigarette kindles and wrinkles with indrawn breath; mouthwater under the tongue that wells and spreads and the swallow of sweet saliva down as the smoke comes in; tingling pleasure of spine and jaw; a trace of haze in the head. See the maker's name stamped on every piece. See the maker's name through the curling lick of nostril smoke. The maker's name and the filling lung and the tightened chest.

Been there the whole afternoon, two of them, sightless in the blue sun. Not catching alight.

Tightened chest like the raw sweet first-love. Endlessly bearable pain of the first encounter, the morning memory of nightlit upturned face among the shrubs and the sudden rush of bewildered knowledge.

That first one gave you a pain in the chest with thinking and thinking, yearning out ecstasy to the oval muted face in the darkness. Her breath was loud and the parted lips somehow frightened with the surprising enamouring. Shadows of leaves shifted smooth across in the creamy oval and you could hear the scuff of the heels of the shoes in the darkness under the

laurels. Fingertips touched the awakening jaw and eyes wondered heavenstruck up as you gasped with the bump of the heart and the panic of it all.

All-enveloping first love, the only love with the sudden pang of the tightening chest; you thought they were all as rending, each as breathless, but when you look back across deserts of later wisdom the others are sweet without excruciation.

She wanders with her oval face in memory's halflight, still as young, still as stirring; doesn't grow old. Still you'll snatch a glimpse of her hurrying away in a crowded street or from the corner of the eye she'll flick across the vision in unguarded moments and you swear it was she with the honey-coloured face and serious eyebrows. They stay unperished the ones who vanish. Like somebody said about things on Greek urns. Fifteen years ago and she's on a Greek urn. Remarkable that she turned out ordinary after all that breathlessness. In the first weeks you got all heaven's honeyed inundation when you saw her in anticipation, standing under the winking neon or at the top of some now-forgotten escalator, waiting for the evening's secret to begin. You stirred all over as you hurried through the lamplight on London evenings; a quickening within and a tingling at the back of the neck as you pounded over the pavement to the figure under the neon.

All night in the park and the urgency of closely breathing faces; the handbag strewn in the damp grass and nightwind in the trees; sweetness of the madness that makes a woman murmur as she looks into the shadowing face.

There were moments when it wasn't physical at all, just unparalleled delight, a kind of amazement that words couldn't cope with, a kind of conjoint magic that reproduced itself in mathematical progression until the tightness in the chest was brimming over and you felt you'd burst with unimagined pleasure. You believed urgently in God as an escape-hatch for your boiling thankfulness. Looking at her speechlessness you knew she had the same whelming there in the starlight, the same breathless disbelief in everything but this reality. There was nothing more to say or do, either of you, tongue-tied in the

rapture. The eyes beneath gazed into the eyes above and the gazing eyes above looked down in a swimming spell of mingling wonder. No words. No speech soft enough for this.

Again to the warmth of the parted lip, the personal smell of the breathing nostril. Hand beneath the garment; enchanted revelation. Sleek and warmth of stockinged thigh, sweet trespass with the noise of traffic in the Bayswater Road and the sough of wind in the broad darkness.

You can see the maker's name destroy itself when the creeping transmutation overtakes it. If you could stop the wind you'd hear the tiny agony of paper frizzling and the sputter and bubble of printer's ink still damp.

Silken sleeve of paper ravels back; reveals a withered arm of ash.

The whole night in the park with the close comfort of each other as morning unshrouded and landscape rediscovered. Seemed unreal, the morning, and you clung to the melting shreds of the night's reality, struggled against the cool beginning of ordinariness as milk-bottles sounded somewhere in Park Lane. But the light revealed the pallor of the oval face, the disarray of straggle-hair and the wake-night lines beneath the eyes. It had all been softened in the velvet black, all covered by the magic and you hadn't realized she'd lost her magic hours ago. She'd grown old with wakefulness, but she didn't know. And when at length you both got up from the flattened grass you felt suddenly smaller against the breadth of world. Smaller and crumpled and the eyes smarted in the nip of the morning and you resented the day and wondered where the night had gone. Brushed each other down of twigs and leaves that had been all the time in the intimate compass of the episode. Thinly laughed at dishevelment with much combing and covert yawns. Now that the face no longer filled the close-up vision you saw her upright from a yard or two and she was small and tattered in the chill park, even a little ridiculous. But you perished the thought with artificial firm embrace and got close up again and walked away from the nestling place together, wanly. There'd be a coffee stall open in an hour.

Walked through the scatter of septembered leaves and iron chairs that sat about the grass in earnest groups. Gates closed but you knew a way out and you held the wire down as she went over and there was still a spark of interest as the high-shod leg went by. Even with a crick in the neck and smarting eye a spark of interest. But you can't start in the middle of an aftermath and besides you'd come to the road that led to the coffee.

Worse the faces in the mirror behind the counter, yours too. Hadn't thought *you* might be unattractive too. Gazed into the chipped mug to warm the cheeks and get some blood back. Harsh glare from the flyflecked ceiling whitens the pallor of the pallid faces and the eyes that look from the steam of tea to the image over the counter are not the eyes you started out with. Aches in unusual places touch suddenly the chilly body. Pelvis has seeped the damp of London night; into its aerated cross-section drawn up humid earth-juice by capillary action. Like a petrified sponge. If you break open a pelvis you can see the cellulation of air-bubbles ossified, like that chocolate that's hollow inside with millions of air cells. Once you get the water in you're water-logged but hot tea laces through the body and heats the water dry, leaving only a condensation trace within the cavities. That stays for ever, but eventually the damp dries up to dusty particles and nobody's any the wiser except maybe the students when they hang you up in a glass case at art-school and hugely humorous call you Willy. Two skeletons prop their hanging clothes against the counter ledge and observe the vestige of last night in the steamy mirror.

Man behind the counter busy with snackbar mysteries adroitly disregarding. Unwritten law of snackbars at six in the morning. No word from the ape with the dish cloth and the gleaming collar stud.

Steam and gleam of the bright machine that stands on the greying marble; stands like a chromium-plated gasometer in a field of lilies. Lilies cluster, each with its cracked saucer, but no teaspoon because of the expense of continually replacing stolen ones.

Dark brown tea goes down the midline scalding, spreading out at the waistline into tiny tendrils of warmth that search and permeate the tubes and pipelines that only tea can know about. Last gulp but two and you can see the sugar at the bottom and being reminded that it's there and paid for you swill the remnant round in the cup. Last two gulps are syrupy with the overdose but sugar's energy, the advertisements say; down it goes. Head goes back to take the drain of crystals and you see the elongated people in the gasometer, streaking narrow down the gleam and it's surprisingly you and she.

Conversational opening after the silence, so you nudge gently and the white nose goes round to look and she smiles when the eyes get there and comes back with a smile but she doesn't say anything. You smile again to prove that you understand her need for silence but you can't think why neither has spoken since you come out of the street.

You can really, though. It's because of the alien morning and the chink of china, the ranks of ginger pop and the shadows under the eyes. The way the fantasy has gone. Suddenly the girl is everyday and maybe you are too. Nobody likes to say so and it's nobody's fault. The thought rankles, that you might be everyday too. Best to cut the thing short, get her on to a bus and have your anticlimax in private. Buttoning of the overcoat, standing the collar to the chill neck—she gets the signal and turns to the mirror behind for the automatism of touch to the hair but abandons when she sees the image and you look hard out into the street as she follows you across the cracks in the mosaic.

Good night. Over the shoulder to the white-clad ape as you hold the door and you frown as he gently smiles.

Good *morning*.

She not noticing passes into the grey open with the lights still on in the lightening sky.

When the fire wouldn't burn back home they used to get a newspaper and hold it taut over the fireplace opening to make the flames come up. You'd see a flicker of yellow somewhere behind and soon there'd be a whoosh of flames that trembled in

the chimney to thrill you as you sat at the adult elbow and always the paper caught and the whole thing caved in with a flare and as like as not disappeared up the chimney tinkling ash in a shower of sparks. All over.

That was the way of the night in the park with the first love. Now only a tinkle of airborne ash in the chimney after the whoosh of warm excitement. Now only the aching pelvis and dirt under the finger-nails, only the damp imprint of the harrowing kiss, cold memory.

Escalating figure turns and looks as you stand at the top and give her your last smile. Very small now, receding, and you're left with a glass-cased booking-clerk and yesterday's posters.

But she gave you the tightening chest and you don't realize that you'll never get it again, never quite the same urgent yearn. Had it herself, too, female version breasted; unwittingly conspired in the one paradisiac fluster of first-love. You turn away from the head of the moving stairs and walk by the concave posters under the lamps. Seventeen and you think the miracle will come again as easily. But there'll be a time on the edge of a windy cliff when you'll have forgotten the very shape and sight of her, forgotten the words she said in your ear under the soughing trees out there in the park. All you'll have for memory is the catch in the breath and the tightness across the thorax that comes only with the first one. Or sometimes a crick in the neck or an early morning snackbar or maybe elongated reflections of you and some other one.

Cigarette's too short for comfort (maker's name took off quite early on) and you pinch the business end together for the last filtrated lungful but there's not enough for lips and finger and you get more air than smoke. Out over the bay into the sparkle but the flick of the thumb is weak and it spins into the breeze and drops against the chalk by the dangling feet. Nestles in a furtive smoulder somewhere in the undercutting but you can't see even if you crane forward. Disturb the centre of gravity with the weight of the head above the upright spine-curve and the gluteus maximus lifts and the strain goes on to the hamstrings and the brain sings forward over the edge and

the hands go back to strands of grass to hold you on. Not worth it for a dog-end.

Abawl with somebody's children now, semi-detached, and the slender hands are chapped with down-to-earthness. Packet of washing powder on the ledge above the kitchen sink damp with the warm wet touch of the recent lather of greasy after-dinner and slippers are down-at-heel. Hands that ream the rime of scum from the clanging bowl are the hands that touched the parkdark lips and the eyes look past the lank of hanging hair with a different look from the look they had when leaf-shadows played and the breath came sharply under the laurels. Wouldn't know it was she who murmured and moved in the starshine. And nor would she.

Except maybe sometimes when the rocking tram goes grinding past some lamplit park and she presses her forehead on to the cold of the window and sees shapes under the trees. Then the quickening pang of seventeen and the wonder that never came back, not even in the marriage bed. The one who sits beside her holding the tickets thinks he's known her murmuring, too, but there's never a murmuring like that first sweet agony and you'll have that for the rest of your lives.

Horizon flecked with sudden grey and it's a ship that's crept from the distant fling of the landmass, invisible move like the hands of a clock, grey fleck in the gaze. Follows the tight-drawn thread of the bow of the distance, stealthy, silent. Must have been while you smoked that it oozed out of the headland. You skimmed the length of the distance before you started not three minutes ago. Skimmed the horizon from end to end as you haunched over for the packet squashed in the lying down and nothing there, not a mark. Taken three minutes to creep from A to B (two inches or so of canvas) and you could work out how long it'll take to get to C over beyond the crumble of rock. If you multiply the distance AB by three the answer's in minutes. Quite precisely, but there'd be trouble in planting the dividers into the haze. No definition. And although he's following a course along the rim of the world at the moment, he might switch and make off over the edge in a sudden huff or change

the speed of the engines so you could never really be sure. Movement so small you have to look away and look back to see that it's moving at all like you do with the hands of a clock. Moving smooth in a groove that's cut in the lip of the distance, a silhouette cardboard ship, mast, funnel, mast; tied on to a length of thread that stretches to C and the hand that pulls is steady and smooth. No sudden jars to give the game away. Illusion perfect, even to the haze that spreads and shimmers, merging the bay with the backcloth. The thread is tied to the keel at a point just behind the bows so that when you pull there's no tendency for the stern to rise. (It would if you didn't arrange it like this because of the sharp dig of forward edge in the groove.)

Fly out over the water and you find as you get nearer that it isn't a cardboard cut-out, it's a perfect model but they've only done the side that faces the Spectator. As though you'd sliced a ship clean down the middle with a razor blade and thrown the other half away. Landward side is all complete, but there's nothing beyond the midline. Hardly necessary because it only faces the backcloth and no one can see round there.

Come down lower and you see that it's not a model but a full-size ship in a full-size sea but the waves are sawed-off in the same way as the ship because that's the horizon and the Spectator (like any ordinary person) can't see further than there.

Your cabin is two decks down and there's a place for hanging your watch and a bedlight that'll give you strong and weak (weak for reading in bed) and a wash-basin there in the corner (h and c) and a ventilator nozzle that chows and scows with the rushing air and you can turn it in whichever direction you like and on the wall by the door a framed portrait of a man with handlebar moustaches wearing a lifejacket and instructions in English Swedish and French on how to bust out of the hutch when the lights go out and everybody starts screaming and trampling over each other in the narrow corridors. English is easier in spite of the erudition, but you read through the Swedish and French to prove that you know them after you've done the

English. Man with the handlebars quite unmoved at the chaos and shouting.

Continuous intermittent blasts on the siren.

Printed in red for safety.

Amazing the trouble they go to to make the thing realistic, even down here in the cabins. The Spectator would never believe they'd be so thorough, even down to printing in red for safety.

Make sure that they haven't forgotten the lifejacket. It's there where the printed frame said it would be under the head of the bunk and it's light and hard but hollow when you knuckle-rap. Dangle it round on its straps to see where your head goes but not too carefully. Stewardess might open the door in a hurry and see you.

Places to hang your clothes and a bell to push and a little shelf for your book and a tumbler-holder over the basin and a seat that flaps down from the wall to sit down on. All laid on. But you should see the first-class cabins.

Something odd about the wall opposite the bunk; looks temporary, with a draught coming through the chinks. Boarded up with plywood like a rough partition. But that's where the ship is split down the middle, the cabin's on the midline and the plywood wall gives on to the backdrop; all oblivion behind the plywood. Just your bloody luck to be given a cabin on the draughty midline.

Same when you go up the brass-edged stairs to the lounge; plywood against the centre handrail and no battening by the sound of the knuckle-rap. You can feel the lilt and plunge of the ship as you turn the landing and you look to the people who sit round the lounge as though you've made this trip innumerable times, just like they have. Seascape's raging grey outside the long window and you can get out on to the covered alley that runs from end to end, so you do, and the wind's a lot stronger than you thought so you turn into the wind to avoid the hair blowing over the eyes from behind. Turn into the wind and sidle to spraywet rail. Waves go by at a helluva lick here by the ship but further away the slower and by the distant cliffs the

water's calm as a sunlit bay if you could only see that far. Perspective of movement. Look for the Spectator but much too far although further up the rail there's somebody pointing, a group of three in raincoats. The young man points and the girl with the tartan raincoat nods vigorously with hands to the rail and her hair blown downstream but it's pretty certain she can't really see what he's showing her. And he couldn't know anyway, about the Spectator. Older man smiles and frowns and shields his eyes and smiles and frowns and shields his eyes again. Consignment of flying ash from the old one's pipe comes down on the wind, but he doesn't notice and you hawk it out of the eye with shivering finger.

Man with short white jacket and soupstains down the trousers trots down the tilting deck at an easy angle past the standing group and you can see that lunch is ready by the gong he's got. You wait for the raincoats to go inside but they hang about with the young man still pointing in spite of the girl pretending she can see it. Wait for them to get inside and you'll be able to choose a table where you can face her and start something over the hors d'œuvre. They shove off past you down the slope and she notices you as she passes and wonders what table you'll be sitting at.

Dining saloon is further down the covered way where it says muster station No. 3 in red on the white cross-beam. Step high because of the threshold they have for stopping the water and it's all mahogany again except for the wall across the way and that's plywood. You can see the maker's name branded in circles at random points and it's fireproof which is handy on a ship. Although probably the regulations require it. Trinity House or the Home Office.

Tartan goes downstairs with the raincoats (first-class stairs) so you'll have to wait till they've taken them off and come back up to the meal. Sit down in the chair in the corner under the fire extinguisher and watch out for the foaming squirt all over the lounge if you bang your head on the knob so shift the chair but the damn thing's anchored by a brass rod from its anus to a countersunk ring in the floor so you can't shift it.

Anchored so that there'll be a semblance of order when you bash through the Kattegat with vomit awash in the bar. Suffer under the red cylinder with the golden transfer in three languages all screaming out at once in the event of an emergency. Nun over in the other corner would wonder what the hell you were doing if you got up again and shifted around after sitting down nice and tidy. Think you were starting something. Other nun's gone to the Abort or whatever they call it on this ship. Gone to Abort or be sick or take some of mother's superior little mothersills. Must be another nun around. Always travel double. Because of men who sit under fire extinguishers badly wanting to commit nunnery.

Ambling of people through to the eating place, all unconcerned but tilting as the ship lurcheth where it listeth. Still no tartan or duplicate nun. Possibly all tied up with the instructions in English, Swedish and French and frightened stiff in triplicate. Much use they'd be anyway under the bunk if they're up in the eating place and we hit a rock. Half a rock, probably in this special case. And they'd scurry down with spaghetti hanging from their mouths to await the continuous intermittent blasts on the ship's siren. *Ordnung musst sein.* You wouldn't give a damn about either of them unless you'd caught the tartan's eye during the meal and then you'd rescue the tartan and adjust her lifejacket before leaving. All on the strength of an eye-caught.

Bunch of people appear in the stairway, dignified and tilting and the tartan comes up at the back of the bunch with the satellites and glances across at you as she goes through to the hall of splendour. You have her if you take your time. Some evening perhaps, in a lifeboat.

By this time the ship is four inches across the canvas.

He's there again waiting with his head cricked under a fire-extinguisher. If we wander in he'll come and sit at the next table after a while. But you'll give your attention to your food and not notice like when you were out on that verandah thing and he pretended to be looking at the white cliffs. Travel is awfully exciting and it would be even nicer if you were on your

own especially with this narrow waist and the lace bodice but the studs keep popping which would be difficult. Can't sew yourself into it and out of it continually. Would be ridiculous in one of those life things and him tying it round you as the band played heroically on and the studs popping at a moment like that.

He's coming across the velvety floor and you observe the odds and ends in the soup as he comes to the table opposite. Clean finger nails and shirt with fine blue stripes, not too broad. Nice. Must have come on at Algiers, or Gibraltar perhaps. Pity it's chillier now, and only a day or two left. Have to be in one of you's cabin. Be frozen stiff in a lifeboat.

Up on the bridge you think you'll go down to eat as you look through the plate glass and you slink out with a mental note that some-one'll have to see to that firkin plywood that's coming adrift again. The draught from the starboard side is chronic particularly when you've only one side to your face, the side the Spectator sees and only one eye doesn't make it any easier.

Bloody Spectator and his ideas.

Circling seagull screams and cries in a swathe of flight above the sand, swoops in an upward soaring glide to the clifftop, arrowing over your head in the blue with orange-dipped beak and snow-white wingspan. Startles you out of the distant halfling ship and the jaw drops for the neck to crick and the eyes to follow the soaring. Quite white. In the blue height, floating now, you can see the twist of the nervous head as the rest of the body's transfixed all motionless in the upward flow of the air from the concave cliff. No movement as the invisible billow comes up from the landmass, no bodily movement, no tremor of widespread wing; just the flick of the head observing. Must have a ball-and-socket neck for the beak to swivel round like that so smoothly.

Gets tired of floating and swoops in a long chute down to the seashore, shearing a sweep of descent in the solid air and rising above the sparkle again in tail-end impetus. Banks and flashes the wingspan over the water, curvets and skylarks, leaving

invisible trails of aero-dynamic convolvulus. Translucent drawing-board diagrams hang for a while in the wake of the wheeling white, hang in a riot of fading curlicues all interwoven in the sky.

Loud conspiracy gathers over the beach. Seagulls. Fly into the wide arena above the sand, all seagulls.

Before, one seagull. Now suddenly more.

Fly in from everywhere, from the landscape behind and the flanks of the bay and from out of the sun, all converging over the shore in a milling tumult. As though you'd blown a supersonic whistle like they have for dogs and the secret shrill had summoned them all to a sudden parley. You can't hear the whistle because the frequency's far too frequent but dogs can and the ears go back in a listening twitch, and they come bounding.

Must be a reason for seagulls suddenly.

You get them like this on the Embankment on a frozen day when old ladies throw crusts from brown paper bags or you get them at Brixham when the trawler goes into its coastwise run and the nets are adrag. Word goes out beyond the horizons and they stream in endlessly, soaring and circling, waiting. Follow the trawl till the net spews out on the slippery deck and there's a slosh and bump of gawping mouths and flippering tails. Clamour the sky in an endless pattern of screaming interchange as the moment comes, crescending with appetite. Skyfulls of seagull hysteria for the spew of seaflesh.

But no food here for the swirling congregation.

Maybe just clangathering like some things do, frothed in a frenzy of vulgar gregarity after the distant seascapes, all lonely. You can't tell because of the raucous inscrutability. Because of mystery that separates you from the unanimity of seagulls. Some other frequency and you can't tune in. Just watch, like a deaf mute at a party. Like a deaf mute at a party, you sidle in after all the passengers are seated. You go in at the special door you had put in (up against the plywood side so that when you went to your seat they wouldn't know anything about the face business.) They all screw round to smile at the captain, to nod and curry his firkin favour but you keep the vacant side adroitly

away from them and none of the waiters goes to your starboard beam as you sit down at the gently shivering table. (The movement is transmitted to the tinkling spoon from the flail and plunge of the engine room but you are quite used to this.)

You avoid the temptation to shift your chair nearer the table because you are the captain and you realize that the chair is only semi-detached. Besides it'll be five minutes before the soup arrives so there's no immediate need for action stations and you sit back against the green leather and pick up the menu with the hand that's cuffed with the tarnished rings of office. You have to keep them tarnished or they'd think you greenhorn captain and there'd be fewer lunchtime nods. Tarnish equals experience and experience inspires confidence and confidence makes for a happy ship. Quite Easily Done.

Happy ship looks on expectantly as monoptic gaze reads off the choice of soups and the soupstained waiter-trousers cloud the issue with infinite variety and it's damn difficult to decide.

Clear, please.

Oblivion blows against the plywood and you have the beginnings of earache in the absent ear (psychological, of course) but on the mahogany side of the universe the passengers nod and lean towards each other to discuss your choice of soup. They have a superstitious regard for the personal quirks of the captain. He is, after all, captain of their fate and must be propitiated; it always pays to be pally with the captain. You are a condensation of God and royalty in this plunging hierarchy and you mustn't let the passengers down.

He's having clear.

Crash of cutlery behind the service door and the heads go round to look but there's nothing to see and round come the heads the other way to look at you and your reaction. Like people at a play who glance up at the royal box when there are swear-words.

To smile would imply slackness, to be fierce would victimize the kitchen boy, so you play intense neutrality till they look away. Re-read the menu and notice that the bloody printer has rushed it again and punched the firkin letters deep instead of

printing it. Pounded into the card so that when you hold it up to the long window-light there's a texture of extrusions on the back. Print should touch the paper like the gentle kiss of hull to quay at berthing, infinitely light. Just touch.

Intense neutrality abandon now. Relax. All passengers' eyes on soup. But don't screw round because of the face business and the peculiar circumstances generally. Lubbers haven't noticed the plywood yet.

Seagulls mill outside the window over the whitening waves all mustering for the galley throwouts. See a galley before the bloody thing's printed at all in future; have it sent up to the bridge where the seagulls wheel outside the plate glass waiting to get at the open side of the face.

Screaming and yelping now in a lather of fuss over the line of seaweed but there's no good reason and you can't hear a single grasshopper in all this. Seem to be kind of working up for something that hasn't happened yet like a crowd waiting to tear a man to shreds as he smiles out of some stage door. Sort of precognition, maybe, or a secret ceremony. Some rite or sacrificial seagullduggery.

Wonder what happened to the duplicate nun?

Demand from under the pit of the guts, muscular tight-insistent and you want to have a leak. Want to have a leak suddenly without any warning—always comes on like that, suddenly, as hunger does. One moment you're all under control and then in a bellyshift you're empty, instantly hungry like a switch going off and you gotter start rambling around the kitchen reading the instructions on greaseproof packets. Same with leaking. Quick pang just over the pubic nub and you start concentrating hard on not letting go till there's somewhere to do it.

Could easily unbutton here over the side. A man could leak at a picnic without anybody noticing if he were sitting on the edge of the cliff looking out and they were all clustered behind him with a table-cloth on the stubbly grass, all paying attention to the primus. No one would ever know. And they'd think he'd gone the whole day without leaking like women do. Funny

about women. Different plumbing set-up; not so susceptible to temperature changes as the outside male. Temperature's what's done it. Draught in the ruckling flies.

Could easily unbutton over the side like this.

Seagulls all worked up in a helldance might notice. You'd bloody well have to watch out then. They say they can see for miles. Dart down from the stratosphere to murder a weevil they've spotted with the ball and socket neck device.

Urgency tightens the backside muscles and you've gotter leak.

Over the side would be quick and they wouldn't notice with all that fuss going on. Not notice a trivial thing like that. Three hundred seagulls and not one of them would notice. Well, maybe a few; maybe one. If one saw you he'd fly out of the wardance like a bloody shot and the rest would forget all about the ceremony in a swirling mass of thunder wings. All hellbent for your radicle.

Better get up quietly and wander into the landscape; do it against those shrubs where they had the scaffolding for the sea-light job. Face the landscape so they won't notice.

If there were another bloke here with you you'd do it over the side. You'd have to. You couldn't tell him you were afraid they'd peck it off. Couldn't. Too bloody ridiculous.

Tighten up and grit the teeth. Sometimes you can put it off by thinking of something else. Fix your mind on some interesting thing and it'll wear off.

How they teach deaf-mutes to talk. They do it by first inducing speech through purely tactile means. Draw attention to the vibration phenomenon in the larynx and smile as you place the deaf fingers to your own throat. Imply with expectant look that you're going to feel the same tremor there in the silent neck. Frown when no vibration comes and smile when you get the slightest trace. Smile like hell when you get the slightest trace. Nods and becks and wreathed smiles to coax the living sound from earless larynx. I got vibration, that's good. You got vibration, fine. That's good, you gotter have vibration. At all costs you gotter have vibration.

But sweat and ache from the bursting sac and it's no good, you're possessed with the urgent pounding need to let everything go in long-drawn sweet relief. And the circling seagulls scream.

Legs hoist up from the downward hang and quickly away from the edge and the whirling gullcloud, cowardly trot with the bursting loins and the sweating pain and the bunched up shoulders, trot to the shrubbery safety and long relief. The unbutton and long relief.

Long relief and you're joined to earth in the welcome welcome welcome arc and the shoulders relax as the leaves of the shrub turn glittery spattery. Background seagulls swirl and squall but they haven't noticed and you button up with danger past and the breath is smoother. Unseeing eyes resume their vision and neck untautens.

In the Harley-Wimpole area there's a nodding of psychologists and you walk back from the shrub a case-book entry. This type of patient goes in constant fear of damage to the reproductive organs. One such patient revealed that he had actually retreated from the presence of a flight of seagulls before urinating. Fear of mutilation was associated with childhood memories. You'll have all the little dogs after you and Along came a blackbird and pecked off her nose. Other indications of guilt feelings were frequent phantasy references to amputations, mutilation, sudden death, etc. The type is frequently met with.

Textbook stuff, but they think in guineas and snooty magazines while you wait.

You get it cheaper up at the back with Auntie Mildred. Dear Auntie Mildred, I was sitting one day on the edge of a cliff all by myself when I suddenly wanted to have a leak. It would have been quite convenient to do it over the cliff (there was nobody underneath) but I was frightened of exposing my person to a bunch of nearby seagulls. So I didn't. I got up and exposed my person elsewhere and everything turned out all right. Should I worry about this? Yours, Worried.

No, your behaviour was quite in order. Decency requires

that we never do this kind of thing over the edge, no matter how convenient. We should always conduct ourselves with decorum even when we are alone. You might have saved yourself a lot of heart-searching by going before you came out.

Not really worth the money; better the guinea variety with the light subdued and note book recording your guilt. Out on the pavement afterwards you walk by Welbeck railings and figure out how many guineas the shame is going to be worth. Street's lined with expensive cars all parked before the doors of guiltless listeners but your bicycle's parked in a side street.

Text-book stuff turns back to the old querencia leaving a lovely steam of leaves in the sunshine.

Seagull fury weaker now, the nub of whirling flight gone thinner. Fringes spread and the outside edge wheels wider, quieter. Centre shifts and changes and nobody knows who's leading; you can see the thinning as you get back and stand on the cliffhang, warm aftermath in the loins.

Ship is at least eighteen inches along the skyline now. Four more to go and there'll be no mark left in the wide haze. Gone like the sudden yacht that blacked the spangle of seashine and then shoved off for the bay next door.

Tarnished cuff goes up to the mouth and you covertly pick the left-hand teeth and you figure out how many moments left before you slide from Spectator's view and the whole thing melts in a seadream. Goes with the silent cease of thought, passengers, fire extinguishers, lifebelts and all. Beyond the approaching headland there'll be smooth disintegration and the plywood will have done its job for the skyline passage and you'll come to in your normal bunk and put up a fearful hand to the absent face and smile to find it was there all the time. Find you were deep in the shallows of some lobster-dream and needn't really have worried. Get out and shave off the inching bristle from both sides of the face, out of Spectator-sight. But for the moment hang on to this reality, just for the last four inches. Passengers would panic if they knew and you'd get indigestion in the mêlée.

Duplicate nun below is lost in the corridors, senses approaching headland oblivion, flurries up tilting stairways frightened; shouldn't have gone to the toilet, should have before we came out. At Gibraltar, or somewhere. You can be lost for days on a big ship and all the decks look alike and there's nobody about you can ask and you're getting hungry and something's on the verge of happening to everybody and you've got to be together when it happens, prayer book and beads and intermittent blasts. Must be together at the frightening end; what does musterstasjon mean?

Musterstasjon is of course Swedish for Muster-station (or is it Norwegian?) but you can't tell her from the grassfringe here (same in Norwegian—or Swedish—and probably Danish, too). Question is academic in view of the coming disintegration. She'll be out of her misery in another three and a half inches and the captain will have awakened with a wonderful relief at absence of plywood and presence of face. Normal boat-drill technique will be useless in spite of the care on her face as she studied it there in the cabin (avoiding the worldly look in the eye of the placid survivor) no boat-drill; only a gentle whisping as she screams out into the atmosphere, all tenuous over the sea, intermingling with a spreading lacery of sea-dreamt half-thought. No pain or panic. Just gossamer rarefication there in the sea-haze, homeopathically mingled with grasshopper brains.

Hardly a seagull, now, only the flitting remnant disconsolate over the sand and one that sits on the smooth of boulder sunning itself. Maybe he was the first to raise the false alarm and he's stayed them out to watch the fun like you get some people who look up at the sky in a crowded street until they gather a mob all gawping and then skedaddle leaving them staring at nothing.

Sun stands fierce in the sky's high centre, imperiously over the worldscape saucer: you can only get it in a quick flash of closing lids, flicking across the blue. After-image in the yellow of the warm-closed lids and the heat seeps through to the bone of the arms; lie and stretch in the grateful peace; lie and smile in the glow. Directly above it's blue all the way, no focus-point,

no measure. Immaculate infinity floats above for ever and ever outwards and there's only the milling granulation of sight to disturb the dimension. You only notice it when you're looking at nothing at all but there's millions of fidgety twinklings like a flurry of angry bugs on a microscope slide and you realize that there's nothing there really but the projection of some secret scurry at the back of the skyward eye. And across the scene as you gaze you get the drift of the lazy floaters, dark tags like the shadow of hair in water. Comes from inside, too; look hard and you find there are constellations of figments scattered at random over the sky all contained in the inward orb. All strung up in the scurrying sky that started off so clean. Lids down to wipe them away but you still get the floaters darkly mooning under the back of the lids. To look at you nobody would know the sight is flecked with drifters. To look at you nobody would know of the captain's predicament or the girl in the rough brown dress who stood in the morning breeze at the edge of the cliff. You gotter get inside to know. Inside the eyeballs and under the sunbrown skin.

Look at the sunbrown skin of a sleeping woman and you wonder what goes on behind the lids and the dreaming smile. Haunched up on the elbow you feel the sun on the nape of the neck and you look shadowing down but it's all a secret. Like the day under the grapes in the cactus garden with the white villa beyond and you creep to the well as she sleeps and you let down the bucket because of the thirsty heat. Let it down without a clang in the echoing cool and she dreams on under the grapes. A lizard, gentle on the stones by the resting head when you get back and she doesn't know. Lizard within inches of the olive face.

For a long time observe the juxtaposition and suddenly it darts off into the shadow and you lie down with the eye where the lizard's was and you look at the sleeping profile lizardly. And gaze at the breathing repose of the upturned face till you're jealous of secrets under the lids and the hand comes up and the finger touches the lid and moves it up and the eye is all horrified under, brainward staring, senseless. A moan in the throat and

the breathing changes and you wait for the sleepy remonstrance but she carries on dreaming and you're appalled at the upturned eye that lies hidden.

Shock of the sight of the eye gives the hand a sudden volition and you shake her back to the garden and you. Shake her away from the inward stare that goes on under the lids in spite of the dreaming smile. Soft throat moan and she stirs and the eyes open up all honest with enquiry but you don't tell her the reason, just kiss the lips with silence and smile at familiar eyes.

She never knew of the horror of the eyes.

And you never knew the secrets of the sleeping face. You can never get inside.

Eyes that sleep in the cliff-edge sunlight turn upwards under the warming lids, upwards into the humming brain to see what's going on.

Humming brain in the roaring spin of the universe. The mind tags on to the urgent shrill of all creation, slips into time with the beat of the wings of the angel of life. Body lies flat on moleculated chalk, ticks over with its private slice of perpetual motion and the mind looks back at the bleak automatism there in the blue shirt, pauses to register pity, and is lost in celestial revolutions per minute.

God sits not in an armchair of clouds. God is the sum total of armchairs and clouds and eyes and shrills and guts and make-believe, the unity that interlocks the lover's touch with the sparkle of urine on summer leaves, the lizard with the Postmaster General, the scream of seagulls with the pointing nipple. That's what God is. God is the look in the eye of the drowning nun and God is the water that gurgles into the nunlung. God is the clean impression of ink to paper and the dirt beneath the fingernails. God is the hilarious joke, the swimming head, the power of speech and the grunt in the throat of the deaf-mute. God is life and the fulness thereof.

Sit on the edge of a cliff for a couple of hours and you get God good and plenty. More you get the more you want. That's how it is with God. And God is this bloody pebble under the pelvis that's been there all the afternoon.

Out of the sky to the body that aches with the sullen cut of the obstinate pebble. Grunt with the twist that allows the hand to scrabble blindly under the hip but no pebble and roll right over on to the face and smell the dust of the chalky grass as you scramble round to the spot where the backside rested.

Knees find pebble pressures scattered about as you kneel but they aren't the pelvis one that's been there all the afternoon. Fold back grass-strands and they nestle within all guilty. Smooth between the thumb and finger and you knuckle them out, five of them gathered in saucered palm and the right hand wanders and ferrets the grass but the pelvis one escapes. Ferret the grass to the landward side of the pressed-out bowl, systematically, taking it in ever-increasing sweeps and surprisingly there it is some inches from where you thought it was. Not a pebble but a flint-chunk embedded and you wiggle it out and it's a helluva size for the backside area's softness. Nine-tenths submerged but sharp as bloody flint where the gluteus maximus suffered.

You get them in museums like this, in tidy rows all docketed; especially printed tags with stuff in italics. Not written by hand or bashed out on a typewriter but set up in type and specially printed. Just one. To prove how important they think it is. All of them just like this in the hand.

The committee's in session and they sit at a trestle table archaeologically frowning. Porter comes with a bucket and spills them all out on the table. Overalled man at the printing machine leans against it waiting for decision. (He's cheating a bit though, because he's already set up the words *flint tool, arrow head* and *spear head* and it's only a question of how fast the decisions come.)

At the end of an hour they've decided that seventeen are genuine and the rest are accidental and the accidental ones go out in the bucket to spend the rest of their lives anonymously sticking in people's behinds where the porter strews them up on the cliff-head. Genuine ones go under the glass with the tags although it's pure luck, really, whether you go under glass or in people's behinds, because the committee's never quite certain. Question of imagination. If you can hold up a lump of flint and

visualize thrust-jawed foreheadless glint-eyes hairily chipping you've got imagination. That's what it takes.

The one in the hand will never know whether it's accidental or not because you're going to spin it out over the bay like the dog-end into the shining sea. But first the pebbles and you stand back from the drop and choose from the five. Out with a shoulder wrench into the breeze and you grunt like the men with the cable did and you rub your shoulder but there are four more. The grunt in the neck is the first word spoken aloud in the afternoon. Foreheadless grunt as the pebble flies out. Track of the plummeting pebble fades and there's no splash of water so the next one's gotter be harder. Grunt again and the muscles drag at the flying wrist that wants to sail out with the stone but can't because of the way it's strung on with tendons and ligaments and strings of muscle and you see the curve of the downward drop. Miserably short of the water. Other three pebbles await the fate of the sailing fling but you spill them out over the edge with fingers splayed; no grunt. Easy drop and they're lost to the eye but you listen for ricochet down on the chalk-wall's flank. No sound of scuttering scattling pebble abounce on the chalk foundations; no sound of arrival.

You're left with museum piece flint-chunk and you stoop and it's warm to the hand. Jagged warm to the open palm and you thumb off the dirt and the shreds of grass and look down for attainable targets below on the beach. Heavier, this one; untouched in its curving fall by the whiffle of breeze; heavy with the touch of glint-eyed ancestor. It'll fall full out with a rushing swing, out to the water, out to the bay's bright middle and splosh in an upward spurt; then smooth slow-motion of tumble and sea-green silence there on the shift of undertow. Ancestor-cooled in the endless sway of the water's wandering darkness.

Perhaps the sea's a bit far for the fling, though; maybe optical the nearness. Pebbles went down without a murmur, down under the ledge of the edge, pathetic after the lurching grunt. Try something nearer, above the seaweed line; in under the edge.

Stand with the flint-chunk cupped in the fingers; scan out vision along the sweep of the yellow shore, stand with the breeze in the ears and shaft out sight to the lastest distance. Foreshortened swing of the sand from the headland down to the foot of the cliff and beyond to the left where the water laps at the crumble of rock. No mark or feature but the straggle of last night's tidemark that stretches from ear to ear of the beaming bay and the cluster of boulders round and smooth that sits in the line of the tideweed.

Seagull preens on the biggest boulder, shadow cast from the noon-high sunglare, preens and startles the eye with the fleck of white on the boulder's brown. Sits all solitary after the maze of beating wings that came to answer the call from nowhere, all silent after the yelping. Sandbound boulders lodge their backsides deep in the crystals, sit with puddlets nestling by for safety.

Mystery how boulders that size got washed up on the curve of beach no matter how fierce the water. Immovable mass been there for centuries, sedate on the shore through storm and shimmering summer. If you went down for a look they'd be six feet high and God knows how many tons; no knowing how heavy because of the way they may be nine-tenths under like the handheld flint chunk. You could dig around and disclose the damp of the underbelly but it would take seven maids with seven mops and the whole thing is hardly a practical proposition. The way they are now they look grandfather pebbles thrown down in pique from Godhands.

Couple of hundred years there'll be other eyesight peering down and they'll have sunk as the sand comes in from the sea's wide silting. Higher beach and a boulders' graveyard. Six and a half feet higher the sand and rocks asleep beneath but you won't be able to tell they're there—all smooth and smiling. Fresh eyes unknowingly over the wide shore from the cliff-top with the ancient novelty of flint to throw and no boulders. Only the dead white bones of the preening seagull that sits embalmed on its sandpacked perch on the boulder's dome, cranium thrust through the sand's new level so that when you walk by you think it's a shell that lies enconched on the surface.

Top of the cliff'll be twenty feet back by then because of the crumbling roar of the falling chalk that's clamoured the intervening nights and you'll have to put back the broken chunks in the mind's eye, hanging secure in the vacant space, so that you'll be able to imagine the way you were today in the shirt and the twentieth-century trousers. Looking out for a flint-chunk target.

Seagull's the one that caused all the trouble (the leaking and the text-book case) and the fingers tighten over the flint and you feel the sharps and the curving flats and the eye spans out the distance from here to the top of the boulder and doubles it because of the optical effect of nearness. Seagull sits and doesn't know of the hurtling jag from the sky that'll fly the feathers of his backside. All innocent.

Wrong to flay the feathers of seagulls but it's a million to one that you'll miss because of the deceiving distance. And they fly off unconcerned at the last moment, anyway, like pigeons in front of taxis; flap out from under the wheels and carry on chatting as though nothing had happened though the skin of the taxi driver creeps for a statutory second. That's what it'll be when the flint flies down; a slow spreading of careful wings and the tail will withdraw from the flint-path just as the shatter of chips flies out from the impact. No vindiction, even from the lazing wingspread, not even an upward glance to the flint-source for future reference. A banking sweep and the bird'll resettle and natter the beak beneath the wing for a final clean-up. That's what it'll be.

Wrong even in principle in spite of you'll miss.

Supposing there were an unsuspected height behind you from which some idle aimer narrowed eyes and measured distance, targetting the innocent nape of the sunbrown neck as you stand with the seaglitter lighting the face?

You screw round for a moment but there's no Goliath and the flint is warm in the cup of the hand and the eye narrows and the left foot forward to break the thrust of the lunge, left hand out with fingers loose and the thumb hooks lightly up in the target area. Seagull poised all tiny on the upthrust thumb.

Fling

out strong with the wrenching arm and you grunt a grunt as the body swings and the flick of the teeth of flint-edge drag their final touch as the trajectory starts and the hair flops over the eyes with the forward rush but hand goes up and you stand and look at the hurtle that beams to the seabird. Higher than need be, but gravity hauls on the curving flight as the force is spent, flattens the outward thrust to a sailing drop and the bird sits calm.

Sits calm and the chink of flint on the boulder yards away comes up on the breeze.

Sits calm and ducks the beak beneath the wing and nidgels.

Bouncing flint from the round of rock scuds into the sand and troughs up a track and comes to rest on the sunny side of the seagull boulder. Glints in the sun with a fresh-chipped facet.

Missed the bird as you knew you would but you gotter have something to aim at. If you'd hit him you'd never forgive the vindiction and the flupper of blood and feathers. All unknowing there in the nape of the backside tailpiece and you'd have dreams for a couple of weeks like they have when they're adrift in an open boat and on the last day they catch a bird and wring its neck and pour out the blood, pour it down the cracking throat and live for the rest of their lives on the strength of a random seabird. They have dreams afterwards of the life for a life and the dying squawk.

Round over the blue shoulder with the scratch of the growing beard but no Goliath and you fit yourself down again into the pebbleless soft of the saucered grass and the glitter comes up from the water but nearer because of the skyhigh climb of the mounted sun and the centre of burning water is touching the ripple of shorelap.

Sitting bird irks as the forelegs dangle because of the sort of reproach you get coming up like a haze from the white. Should have flown off altogether when the flint went down, should have left you alone in the empty bay with nothing to smirch your afternoon. Sits calm on the stone and rebukes the intent

of the flinging hand and you wish the bloody thing would take off instead of reminding.

Keep coming back to the boulder, the eyes, dragged from the sparkle's hypnosis. Could shift the bird with a sudden shout. Sudden yell and no aim needed. Like they used to have bird-scarers on farms.

Lot of fuss about a seabird but the eyes keep coming back and it was supposed to shove off when the big lot went. Sudden yell would flit it away and the bay would be yours again, shining up under the eyebrows, suntingle on the forehead, warm and hypnotic. With the infinite hiss of the summer world and the roaring blue and a muzz of grasshopping overtone.

If someone were around they'd wonder what the hell if you suddenly yelled. Take a lot of explaining a sudden bellow if someone were smooching up quite close behind, and you were so full of the sound of the endless open that you didn't hear the touch of the grassborne shoes.

Quick flip round and there's still not a living bloody soul. Not a soul the whole of the afternoon except for the blobs in the yacht that came by surprise. All creation spread around to scan from under the cragging brows and not a solitary soul. Not unless you count the grasshoppers and the spider and the things wiggling into the puddles under the rocks and the seagulls and this last one calmly sitting, but that's getting theological and this is hardly the time or place, with a bloody great yell coming up any moment out of the living throat.

Breath comes in and you get a picture of the widespread seascape frozen into the eyes as you balance on the tip of the in-drawn breath and indecision lingers for a twenty-fifth of a second and the thorax

sings

with the chestdeep rough of the larynx into the sunshine.

The air's surprised and there are multiple eddies from the sudden shock of voice in the stillness. You get a sensation of tingle and the bird takes off, instinctive, automatic. Sensation of tingle across the shoulders and the larynx tickles with reminiscence of the rough good voice and the bloody bird's shoved

off as though it were being chased by a million taxidermists.

Quick check-up but nobody round and you might be the only man left in the world for all the answer you get to the throated yell. The only man in the world and you sit and watch the spearheaded flights of taxidermists skeltering over in V formations after the scurrying seagull.

Can smile now as you bump the heels in the chalk below and flick the sight on the empty beach. Smile at the smiling sand and the boulders and the glint of the sun's image angling back from the flint chip.

Something projecting from the brown silhouette of the boulder. The big boulder where the gull was.

Heart goes thumping suddenly under the shirt-button. (Looks like a foot. Looks like a human foot.) Can't be anything really but the heart goes pounding on unreasoned. Long thin shape on the sand on the boulder's bay-side. Long thin shape. (It's a foot.) Illusion, must be; been here for hours and nobody about. It's the awkward shape of the mass of a clustering boulder, not round like the rest but same family, same geological structure, born in the same ice-age like they all were. (It's a human bloody foot.) Travelling tingle over the shoulders and down the hunching spine. Tingling thrill of fear along the thighs to the edge of the cliff and the blood turns turtle in arm-veins. Jaw drops and the head sways sideways to orientate the footlike shape, focus it back from the foreground boulder.

Breath unaccountably quicker and you gotter be sure.

Quick eyes round on the rippled sand for footmarks but all untouched so nobody came as you mused at the hanging sky, nobody crept in under the rocks while you went off leaking into the hinterland. Could have been when you looked for grasshoppers, nosing the grass with ears at the twitch or when you were out with the cable-layer, unseeing eye preoccupied with bay-mist and rusty anchor-rattle.

(*A foot.*)

Back of the head shrills insistent, italics in the floundering mind and there's gotter be a reason for unnoticed foot-shape, gotter be some way out of the obvious track of the thought to

the wild conclusion. Must be a quirk of boulders, footlike beyond the bulk of the nearer shapes, spread on the drying shore to touch the mind that sings beneath the straggle of Spectator-hair.

Back of the head insistent and you sit with the heart unleashed and the knuckles you see suddenly white on the clenching hands that fold the edge.

Dead person there on the sand all the time waiting for the glance from the rambling eye to rive the attention and split the dreaming world open with sudden presence, with the shock of undetected presence quiet as you muzzed in the sunlight. Dumbly waiting for the rending shrill of recognition and the prickling neck and the pumping heart, all now suddenly guilty with mistaken solitude. There all the time, sprawled in the final moment of some mute tragedy. You were alone in the baysweep, the only eyes that shafted out from the cliff, the only manshape, warm and breathing and all the time there's been someone else, boulder-hidden.

Straggle of rocks it must be and you focus hard on the shape and it could be the leg of a lover concealed, alive and breathless with satisfaction, involuntarily stretched in aftermath, after the secret sweat of flesh and facts of life in the grit of the crystals. Could be and you're guilty again with peeping but there aren't any footprints, no marks around the nest of the silent coming, waist-clasped, quietly eager. No marks in the soft of the crystals and you've gotter have marks because of the mark the flint made as it ploughed a track in the surface after its ricochet; fledged into the sand with a tail-streak left where the force had been. Still there now with the glint on the flint half-gone as the sun climbs. Still marked in the fragile sand the trail of the scud of the flint. You can't get away from the mark of the trail in the top of the sand. Churned up a streak as it darted, scattered a powder sideways, out like the wake of a darting boat, but the wake stays put, not mellowed and lost like the smoothening lace of waterwake. Still there. Proving the texture of sand and the softness. Witness.

You couldn't put a foot down there on the beach without

the print of the pressure proving the texture. No human foot to the sand without a mark of witness left.

Should be a trail of amble over the surface, twofold, tracked from the distant approach by the headland, wandering; casually willed by the joint delight to the private screen of the boulders. Or from the rocks at the other end, after the helping hand and the puddle-leap and the lap of the sea to the shoes. Sand spread out all welcome under the sun and the sight of inviting nest on the tideline. Should be; but no bloody marks, and the skin stirs again at the sight of the mark that sticks from the round of the rockhard rock. Sticks challenging out and it looks like a foot and a bit of the ankle and the undetailed shape makes you know there's a stocking that smothers the chinks of the toes and the sharp of the ankle, smooths out the sculpted shape anonymous, soft.

Woman lies there in the sunlight.

Or could have swum in from the foreground, spluttered in from the sparkle and stretched to dry and get back the breathing and lingered and slept in the warmth of the boulders. Lingered and snoozed with the runnels of baywater trickling off and the mind amuzz with exerted pleasure. That could be. Unseen like the blobdecked yacht. You can't keep tabs on the whole of the scene especially when your attention flits from the sky to the chalk and spider and nipple. You'd develop compulsion neurosis if you sat and watched everything at once, faster and faster flicking till you went off your rocker.

(Dead woman lies with stockinged foot.)

Could easily have draggled in from the sea unspotted, riddled the sand with the streaming water, gasping after the baywide swim, shining limbs all aching and the dusting sand picked up on the footsoles, stuck to the wet as she stepped to the boulder shelter. Sat with swimsuit buttocks into the warm of crystals, unsheathed the tightened head and shook out sudden hair as she looked at the bay in retrospect, recounting the dying strokes in the muddle of popple. Lay back after a while of musing, stretched and slept. Slept in the sun and breathed, quietly, not knowing the presence of eyes above and

of other breathing going on in unconscious synchronism. Unaware synchronous tempo of cliff-top breather turned to the boulder clump, legs over the side and eye on the ball of the world but you didn't know you had company.

Ran down the flat of the warm of the concrete with the young man after you laughing. Hotel-folk heads at morning windows watching the scudder of bathing girl to the splash at the end of the sloping sundeck. Padder of heels on the stilted concrete and the laugh behind and the sea comes up all smooth and the forearms plunge and the water's over and you come out of the scooping curve in a burst of breath and you splutter the sea and look back for the following bobble of glistening him and you shout but he doesn't hear. Sudden decision and you dart absurdly bee-line bent for the distant shore and the shimmering cliff. Impossible but the will and the strength is there if you don't think about it too hard and there's a singing lust in the ploughing arms that sleek the water and you don't care if he's left behind bewildered. Look back but the bobbling head is far and you've started now and the rest is automatic until the shore looms up.

At lunch you'll be able to laugh at the unannouncement of the streak for the cliff and he'll say he was worried. Too far for anyone and he doesn't know how you did it or whatever possessed you. Admiration sparkling in the frown and modesty from your side of the table over the carnations. Modesty and the thrill of recall and the remotion of water from the laundered napery.

Look up and you're rounding the jaggle of rocks and the bay spreads out behind embracing and you mark a point in the curve and decision again gives strength to the suppled limbs, quicksilvers the body to follow the mind to the point you've fixed on. Steady the rhythm, smooth, unbroken; energy left in the back of the head and the smoothlined arms. Will and power still taking it easy, no frown yet for the number of strokes that are left in the bag for the rest of the way, just driving certainty, effortless onward.

But you don't see the blob from the cliff. Don't notice the

pin-point of black in the scintillation. It's lost in the luminous counterchange of twinkle and sparkle and besides you're involved with the depth of the press of print to the yielding menu paper and half of your mind's on the tarnish.

That's how it happened. Stole a swimming march on the cliffdream and darted up from the water out of the sight range into the snug of the boulder. Swam round the headland out of the bay next door and now suns the sleeping body calm.

But you're studiously avoiding the stocking effect.

Avoiding the creeping chill of the dead certainty and the dead leg limp from the body that's been there all the time. Sway the head and the shape moves independently of the boulder, no clearer to identify, but you can sometimes make up your mind with a new angle. Like you sometimes look up and there's a tiny bottle of ink on the coffee-table but you move the head and it's really on the stool behind. Small because of perspective, but you didn't focus and it sat in the flat plane of the two-dimensional vision.

Close one eye and you get the flat effect with the shape sticking out of the boulder as though it were a petrified branch left over from when the rock was vegetable. Open the other and the shape flicks into position behind in a plane of its own and you can check on this by moving the head and getting the movement effect, slightly shifting the shape from its hiding behind the flank of sunlit brown. Only slightly, though, because the distance is too far for the headshift to uncover more than an extra inch of the foot.

Foot all the time, there's no other answer.

Well, maybe yes, but it's gotter be alive, sleeping or loving or sunbasking or anything else you like but it mustn't be dead, must not be dead. No death down there quietly waiting all the afternoon. For God's sake not that. Don't for God's sake let it be dead with some drowned thing silently owning it lying patiently for you to go down and see about it.

You've said it's a foot.

If it's a foot you've gotter go down and see about it. Can't get out of it. Wouldn't have lain there all this time if it were

pleasuring itself (sunly or fleshly), wouldn't have stayed moveless on the beach, even sleeping.

Maybe it's moved though, slightly, maybe it's twitched like you do in dreams when you fall off the top of the skyscraper and the heart and guts come up and the yell sticks in the back of the throat and you find yourself spreadeagled and clutching in your foolish bed. Then you twitch. You get a helluva leg-twitch then as you fall, though you only know the tag-end of the twitch as you jolt awake and the sound of the frightened move in the bed still sings in your ears.

Maybe it's moved, sleeping or lusting. With a distant object like that you can't always notice the subtler movement. Like you can't see a man breathing from a hundred yards. Maybe it's moved into view from the screen of the boulder. Maybe that's why you haven't noticed it before; just moved into sight from behind where it's been all the time. That would constitute a move alright. A helluva lovely move. Maybe that's it. Holy God make it move. Make it jig out suddenly and the world'll go back to the sparkle and shimmer and grasshopper noise. And pebble concerns. If you look through a chink in the fingers you can isolate the shape and watch for the move, blot out the landscape and you get the foot in the chink and the edge of the boulder darker in the tiny foreground. Smell of the grass-wiped sand to the nostril and press of the thumb right-angling back to the temple's moisture. Snuffle of breath all suddenly close in the shielding hand and you remember you're breathing and put a pent-up stop to it while you steady the head and the hand to focussed pin-point. No breath and the foot lies still. Stocking alright and it's the left foot because of the way the peak of the toes mounts up right-handed. Fear all over, badly, from the way the toes mount up. Breath still held and you've gotter burst and the thing lies bloody still and you let it out in a rush. Collapse the hand and freshen the gaze with a random look at the cliffscape's sweep, look away in the haze and forget the lurk that prods from under the boulder. Forget the haunt of the shape that spills from the back of the rock; foot with no marks in the sand around and been there all the lovely time.

High sun rages into the hair and you can feel the tingle of scalp where the roots are warmed. Hotspot drills in the crown on the midline and the fingers reave and re-arrange the tangling heat shafts, disperse the focus. Eyes out to the liquid skyline and what the hell happened to the thread-drawn halflark? Any more for the halflark but it's too bloody late and they've gone the whole seventeen inches; or sixteen was it? Dividers into the skyline again to check but you can't really concentrate with the skulking thought of the shape that's there when the eyes go down. The deathpoint under the skirt of the bay that you can't help going back to.

Seagull again in the blue with a screech and you bet it's the same one come back to assert its superiority. More screaming this time and the circling faster. Don't follow the lilt and turns that flourish the sky. Don't watch the evanescent sky-trails because he'll end up on the rock where he was before and you'll have to look down to the boulder foot and the foot that points with the peak of the toes to the right-hand side. Anywhere but there.

He held up the chink to the roving eye and I'm damned if I see it he said.

Sudden intrusion that makes the guts turn turtle like you get when your hand comes across a face in the dark and you thought you were alone. All the afternoon and that lying there. Realization goes off with a bang at the back of the head and you've gotter let the echoes fade before you go on. You could easily fall off the edge with a sudden shock like that. Spill over the side with the force of a thought.

Grasshoppers coming in loud and clear and you want to go on listening to the murmur, get mixed up again in the singing universe but the drag comes up from the shore and you have to resist the need to look and the effort dispels the hum of the world. Breaks the spell of the world's reality and lands you up looking so hard at nothing that the skyline shifts in nervous jerks as the eyes get tired and blink in the breeze. Lids down for safety but you get images sharp and clear of the sprawling foot in the sand. As though you had transparent eyelids. Eyelids

useless and the head sways too so open up for safety. Fix the glitter of water and bring back sparkle enchantment. Fix it hard and you don't have to think, just seep in the pattern till you're flooded with sparkle that floats in the back of the head and there's a gentle suffusion of shimmering light thrown on to the screen of the mind from the chink in the slit of the lids. Everywhere jostling in endless confusion and you can put the whole thing out of focus by letting the muscles go. Gaze long enough and the effect is like pins and needles in your numbed-up brainbox. Eyes water with the effort of relaxation and the lids squeeze tears fresh-cold in the breeze.

Effort of will and you shudder out of the sparkle, smearing the drying salt with the hand-back. Tingles on the suntouched skin but you gotter get the situation sorted out and you'd better stand up. Eyes covertly down to the beach as you drag up the legs; crunch in the side of the shoe means you've got a lump of chalk in from the kicking around in the cliffside and you can have a couple of quiet thinks about the whole thing while you leisurely unlace but it's still there you saw as you clambered up; and the seagull sitting.

Must have been why they all ganged up in the revolving swirl; because of what was under the boulder. Drawn to some mournful nub in the sky that had been there all the time. Still there, if you had seagull eyes and the ball and socket arrangement. Food they're usually after when they mill round shrieking but the thing on the shore isn't food.

Fear comes back as you slip off the chalkful shoe and you get a picture of seagull's food that straggles and spreads in the sand from the shaft of the st linged foot, red and pink; unseeable.

Headswim but lettering in the side of the open shoe holds you on with size 8½ and the chalk clatters down from the toe and lobs over size 8½ to the grass.

Still unarranged as the shoe slides back and scruffle the knee with the chin as you stoop to the tying. Mechanical hands do an excellent job in spite of the swirl of the mind in the chinrest head. Automatic, like they get you to do in the army so that when all

hell blows up around you quietly go on by numbers. If you hadn't got it by numbers you'd be all over the place with excitement and worrying about what was going to happen next and you'd finish up in indecision and a spatter of tracers up your panicking backside.

You gotter figure out the situation on the sand and the brain goes round like a catherine wheel but the shoelace practically ties itself. You still haven't decided.

Get the thing organized. Hoist up on hindlegs and what are you going to do? If it's a straggle of chance-shaped stones you're a bloody fool and it probably is and you're a bloody fool. Up to the upshot edge and another look.

Bird sits calm and it's a foot alright. Standing you get a slightly different viewpoint, but it's a foot. Haul off a yard or so along the fringe and you turn and look and it's still a foot and you get the same gut-turtle each time you look. You hang on to the objective role like hell because of the risk of the snap of thought that'll take you down to the water's edge and you know you'll have to scramble the body down after it to check on the mind's eye set-up. Scramble and tatter your way down the sheer of the reeling cliff and walk out over the sand to confirm the mind's eye. Peer suddenly over the rock with fear in the ears and the heart banging. So keep the mind objective and the whole a matter of vision and shapes and distances. Hang on to the doing it by numbers.

Back along the edge but you see no more from the other side of the backside saucer; rock moves round in relation to the thing, round a little to the left, but you get no more of the thing than you did before. If you went right along the edge to a couple of hundred yards away you'd maybe see round the boulder; smaller image, but you'd get it. Or up the other way, maybe.

Or you could walk straight off through the grasshoppers and never come back.

Straight back through the meadowing grass with the moveable shadow of grasshopper silence around you, away from the bay and the glitter and the sound of the fiddling waves. Go with

the sound getting fainter and the back to the brilliant seascape. Back turned to the sun and the problem under the boulders.

You could do that.

When they were picking plums in the garden they gave you an extra whopper one all for yourself. It was heavy with plumness and there was a reddish-blueness under the white dust of the garden sky. Mouthwater and you looked for a long time before you broke into it, feeling the syrupy squelch before you got it and they stood around watching you admire it and made fun of your lingering. When they'd turned their backs and were busy you took the biggest mouthful you'd ever had and the sweetness ran down the sides of the tongue and settled underneath where the mouthwater comes from. Delicious under the tree in the garden and you looked at the part where you'd bitten and there was a blackened tunnel tiny in the flesh of the fruit. You'd chopped the tunnel in half with the teeth as you'd bitten and out of the tunnel came scurrying a big leggedy beetly thing. Made you spit out the sweet in a sudden retch. Spat it out to the last shreds. Spat it, spat it, till there was only the frightened saliva there and you spat that too. Horrible. And you picked up the fallen plum where you'd dropped it and took it and threw it as far as you could without daring to look at the cross-sectioned tunnel again. Threw it far and secretly, splosh into the path and it dragged wetly on the asphalt as it skittered. Nobody saw your disgust and fright and shame. Shame was for the leggedy thing that had been quietly living there on the tree top, plum-surrounded and the sudden calamity of the teeth intrusion and the panic as you rushed out of the tunnel to see what had happened and the fling of the downward household and you flew all stunned in a flail of legs and beetly black to the jolt of grass. And lay frightened, upside-down in the tall grass breathless.

Glad that nobody saw the sweetness and the shock and the quick shame for the sundered household.

You could throw the whole firkin bay-scene splosh like that into the blue of celestial asphalt, skim it out into nowhere

angrily. Ducks and drakes with the glittering beauty gone suddenly rotten with deadleg.

Walk away into the hinterland world and forget the incubus under the boulders. No one would know that you'd taken a juicy bite out of the afternoon and flung it away because of the shock and the shame of the woman dead in the sunshine.

Woman dead because of the still upturn of the pointing foot and no marks of the coming pressed in the sand. Dead because of the stocking that she wouldn't have on if she were swimming. Dead because you know bloody well she's dead, knew since the first clang of vision. Brought up last night by the inward urge of the water when it left the seaweed line and seeped off back for another load. Drowned and drangling in the rhythm of shorewater, gently laid on the sand and dried by the sun and now waiting mute for someone to go down and see about it. Like a dog with a bone at your feet and you have to be interested.

No possible answer but drowned.

Prickling neck as the death-fear comes back and the eyes go down to the focal point. The eyes have been wanting to look all the time and they go back now with a kind of relief to the focal point. Still there the foot and the seabird sits and waits for you to work up guts enough to go down and do something about it. Sits not looking at the leg and the owner but out into the haze of bayspread, waiting.

Impossible to get down, anyway, no scrag of path, no slither-point, nowhere to start from. Only the outward hang of the jutting fringe, precarious over the chalk. No one would expect you to risk it, not for a corpse, they wouldn't. Not over the edge of a bloody precipice just to go down and see about it.

Forward step to the edge to confirm no pathway down but the poise is swayed in the breeze and better go down on the haunches, close to the grass for a careful check. Sprawl out back with the toes in the grass-chalk, belly and chest to the precipice. All flat out and head hangs over the airy void and you feel the pound of the neckvein. Gravity draws and the lips hang out from the teeth in the downward urge and you get

the chill of the air on the frontal gums. Out behind the toecaps dig in the dust and they won't relax till you're safe again. Dig in deep for an anchor and you draw in the lips to the naked gum because of the airchill and the eyes flick round without moving the head and you get the inward flank of the chalk, all empty under the flat of the body. All empty but it curves out back to the sand beneath and there's a scrubble of green where it joins the beach. Rivulets into the face of chalk where the rain has been and sudden jags and shrivels of grass and you'd be bloody lucky if you got down this lot even if you had extra high-powered double hydraulic suction-pads.

Look long with the space-hung head and the throb gets loud in the back of the eyes, neck large with veins. Impulse to crowd back quick from the outward hang but you stay put with cheeks heavy and sight that flicks with the regular pump of the blood-pent head. Image of sand and rocks beneath gives a twitch each time the blood thuds but you're locked in a kind of haze like they say a chicken gets when you draw a chalk-line on the ground in front of it. Kind of will-less, mesmerized. Kind of fixed in a top-shot view of the boulders and they lose the fright the longer you stay. Settle down into patterns and shapes on the yellow shore and the leg's no longer a leg but a darker mark that sprouts from the bouldering brown. Tideweed wiggles from one corner of the sight to the other, slanting across and it's not sea stuff now but a vagaring pencil trail and the eye tracks along without turning the head, follows the raggling curve from the softer distance till you get the sudden rounds of the rocks that spatter the half-way mark below. If you fixed the end of a plumb line into the central cell of the hundred and twenty million you've got crowded into the concave eye-shell (the central one of that lot would take some working out, but it can be done) you could thread out the line neatly through the iris and drop the lead (gently, so as to avoid pulling out the whole eye) and the lead would swing a little and come to rest exactly in line with the point where the boulders break the draggle of sea-weed. All in perfect alignment, eye-shell, iris and boulder-point; but you'd have to watch out for the

swing of the cord in the wind, muscles slack for the swing of the cord to ball-and-socket the eye in the ratio of a couple of yards to a thousandth of a millimetre. Resist the sway of the cord and you'd ruin the delicate poise and the experiment would be null and void.

Foot sticks out but it's flat on the background, no dimension; and you have to remind yourself what it is but you don't bother to disturb the dull pleasance of the mulling and you leave it as a mark like a smudge on the background. No content, no significance.

Worked yourself quietly into a haze, anaesthetized so that you know what's going on but it's soft, remote and you don't get the sharp, significant edges. Can look at the mark from the boulders now and you don't get the turtle-turn under the diaphragm or the clang in the head-box. They give you dope in hospital to stop the pain and it's just like this with pain yelling out fit to bust somewhere under the surface but there's a wad of cotton wool in its mouth and you can hardly hear it like a murder going on in the room upstairs but it's nothing to do with you. Pain fit to bust but you can give all your attention to the click of the nurses' heels and the swish of the dutiful sterile skirt and the godly smell of the floor-polish. One half all closed down but the other half knows what's going on and doesn't give a damn.

Into a quiet haze and you know there's a dead thing under the boulders but you don't give a damn.

All the attention to straggling curve of pencil-mark in the flat of the yellowing paper. Paper rough with the handmade texture that looks like mountains when you get out the magnifying glass and the track of the pencil bounces from crest to crest of the rippling sand and stops when it gets to the roundel boulders. Goes on the other side as though nothing had happened and streams off soft into the distance as the eyes follow but the head stays fixed in the petrified still of the spell of the humdrum numb in the headback. White mark sits but you get no birdthought only anonymous smudge that came by chance from the white of the paper showing through the rockpaint.

Seagull waiting for you to go down and see about it but you've got it all fixed as white paper showing through and you don't give a damn. Self-induced hypnosis.

Due to the blood to the head and the neckstrain over the edge and you can snap the thread of the thoughtstream clean as a whistle any time you want to and get on with straightforward thinking but once it's gone it'll be the helluva job getting back, like breaking into a dream to answer a dimwit telephone and coming back afterwards trying to dream yourself into it again but it's gone. Switch off the humdrum numb in the back of the head and you'll have to answer the ring of the upturned foot and the muted call of the seagull.

Better to muzz with the gathering moisture swimming the sight and the rising throb of the pulse in the head. Out of focus and twitching smearily each time the bang goes, warm and yellow.

Sun on the necknape and you'll get sunstroke.

Shapes back clear and it's boulders and sand and seagull and you've gotter make up your mind about going down to look and artificial respiration and the gurgle of sea-water deep in the glutted trachea. Back clear again in a flash and the head comes up with the tug from the back of the neck and the eyes blink clear in the sunlight and you go back on the heels and rub the remnant of weight from the belly and chest. On the hard of the heels and there's water on the lashes from the swimming sight. Face to the breeze and eyes are chilled with the drying wet and you smudge with the dangle of blueshirt cuff. Smear off the crocodile tears for the sprawling legshape. Heels to the bones of the backside and the toes turn under.

You can get like that if you do anything too long, go all numb and warm so that things go mentally out-of-focus. Question of repetition like saying a name to yourself over and over again. First time you say it you get a flash of the person, all complete with colour and hair and smell and sound of the voice but if you go on it gets meaningless, until finally it's a physical sensation in the mouth and throat, no meaning. You have to leave it quiet for a time before you can get the reality

back. Leave it and pounce on it suddenly while it isn't looking and you get it loud and clear again. Sort of wear it out with repeating it so that the brain doesn't click any more like Pavlov's dogs when he kept on ringing the bell. Looking too long's the same and you get a veil over the wriggling brain and the image beats on the cells of the eyeback over and over again but because it's always in the same place it's like the name that goes lull and void and eventually you're hanging over a bloody cliff with just a pattern all abstract below and you don't worry about gurgling gullets any more. Too long and you'd probably never get back to reality, shut the door behind you and it has a yale lock and you've left the key inside.

Back on the heels and alive again to the touch of the breeze and grasshopper hum, lumpy under the knees (probably pebbles again) and the hard crease of the leather cuts into the knuckles of toes bent under. Hands brown on the smooth of the trousers all warm to the palms but the eyes flick up to the fitful straggle of grass at the edge that covers the sight of the foot. Resist the call of the woman dead whose thought spins on in a muzz above the boulders wondering when you're coming down to try artificial respiration. Resist the call and hinder the flight of the mind to the sandy deathbed. If the thought goes down like it went to the skyline ship you'll be caught in the foot's reality and it'll never let you go till you've scrambled over the edge with heart banging and cowardsweat trickling through the eyebrows.

Pull away thought from the call and there'll be no horror of sprawling corpse, no gasping sight of fear in the deadwide eyes. Shove off back from the edge and somebody else'll tidy it up and when you come by tomorrow you'll look over in the sunshine and there'll be just boulders and tideline; no foot-sprawl. Nothing to show there was anything dead on the shore all the time you were happily mixed with the hum of the world. No mark of the fear that sprang from the backside cup in the grass or the shame of the shoving off into the landscape leaving the body to sun itself under the boulders.

All tidy again with tomorrow's sun on the water and only

the seatmark left on the edge. You could ruffle it up with the hands so that all trace was gone and the grass would grow a couple of millimetres in the night and forget the shape of the backside press.

Same as when you went by in a bus the morning after the bombs had ploughed up the people at the end of the road. Sat on the top of the bus and glanced down with the coward heart banging and shame for the way it hadn't been you and you just carried on sitting and nobody knew of your white face in the dark of the bomb-rent night and the panic that came with the downward whistle that ended up at the end of the road and you didn't go out to drag the tatter of humans away from the dust and floorboards. Couldn't face the scream of the sundered body and the sight of mashed-up faces under the drone of raiders. Couldn't live out the nightmare night of heads and arms in a crazy scatter; couldn't see guts spewed out from a summer frock and not go raving mad.

That's why you can't go down to the thing on the beach because of the nameless way it'll be when you get there.

Up from the knees and the downward move of the edge discloses the shore and the seagull mourning still. Quick flick at the foot and the glance is away as you brush off the knees of the chalkdust trousers and turn away before the thought gets down to the image under the boulders. Away from the edge and you face the grey of the hinterland, grey because of the way the iris has closed as you looked at the sun and the baylight and now it's a darker world behind till the aperture opens. Headswim again because you've got up too quickly (something to do with the semicircular canals at the back of the ears) and the step is wandery over the grass but it'll wear off in a moment. You get the warm of the sun on the back of the shirt and the breeze comes roaring over the flap of the collar.

Hands in the pockets are flat on the sinewing thighs and you can trace the ripple of mechanism as the legs smooth forward over the grasshopper grass. Eyes screw tight and there's a multiple afterglow of the sun in the back of the head, blobbed and streaked in a luminous tangle like a heavenly underground

map. Blobs are where the eye rested for a moment and the streaks connect the blobs in a smeary lightline. Stays floating, the whole display, and you've got a precise record of what your eyes did when you last looked out over the bay, but it'll fade by the time you've got to the shrubs. Shrubs with more colour now that the iris is opening and you look for the sparkle of urine but the sun has cooked it dry. Dry now and only invisible crystals of leakwater left on the leaves to be blown and distributed over the headland. Some kind of chemical you've got in your leak that's good for the soil and makes cabbages grow. Surprising. Manure it's called in the laboratory but it's common or garden enough in the lavatory and the earth cries out for it for cabbages. The world is my earth-closet. You wouldn't think to look at anybody they've got the bloody awfullest smell inside them all the time even when they're in evening dress and handing round cigarettes. And the one under the laurel shadows in the park with God's own beauty shining out of her eyes, she had it too. And Liluška walking in the Václavské Námésti on that spring morning, she had it. Martin Luther and Joan of Arc and Sibelius and Nell Gwynne and Julius Caesar and Dante, all with the foulness in them under the beauty. Runs through the human race like a secret society, popping up from time to maculate time to remind us that we are processing stations for the food of the morbid earth.

God is in the anal passage and the peristaltic action and the public záchod in the Václavské Námésti on a spring morning.

God is the turn of the coward-back to the sun that dries the flesh on the bones of the not-long-dead. And you can't just walk away with hands in pockets. Gotter go back and see about it before the latent breath is water-logged, while artificial respiration still has a chance. Maybe still a chance for the muzz of thought that floats but can't cry out in the wide beach. The mind that saw you irresolute at the top and wondered what you would decide to do. Mind that was gagged like in a skyscraper dream and wanted like hell to cry out but couldn't and saw you humming and hah-ing and wasting the chance of deliverance. Infuriatingly saw you for hours, dawdling the legs over the side

and scraping semi-circular grooves in the chalk. Mingled with you in the frittering doodle of Postmaster General and marine fire-extinguishers, patiently waiting till the scanning eye would light on the outthrust limb and switch the mind from the back of the head to the tidemark deadline; clang to a frightening stop like it did with the shock of reality.

Was jolted as it muzzed, jolted by the shout from the cliff-top that rang in the curve of the cliff and scattered among the chinks in the crowding boulders. Thought-muzz sprang to a new vibration with the sudden sound, urgently milling, alive again with expectation but all that happened was the idle spreading of seagull wings and blueshirt up at the top still hadn't noticed.

Roving eye that had it all taped into squared-up graticule sections couldn't see the obvious foot that dumbly stretched. You wanted to waggle the leg to get his attention but the mind had somehow escaped the ends of the tautening muscles and although you waggled like hell there was nothing doing in the leg department. Tried to roll over in the sand and flop out under his notice away from the screen of rock but although the mind grunted with the effort and the power was enormous the body held flat to the ground and he carried on gawping round the horizon. You can amuse yourself for hours in the conmingling of thought in his male mind and had the circumstances been different you would have enjoyed the insight it gave you but you were thinning out in the breeze a bit now and you needed all your effort to remain intact.

Fashion his mind to realize your need. Let him hallucinate over the spill of body to the beach; death, danger, fear. Suggest with the tiniest touches of thought that there might be something around on the beach to look for. Up there your mind struggles anonymously, twisting and bending his thought to the subject below but he's sky-borne and busy trundling manhole covers. Can't be bothered, sorry. Back in ten minutes. Gone to the Heavyside layer.

Now it's a splutter of brains agleam in the crystalline shore but he still doesn't get it, try as you will. Seagulls round in a

squall and there's a danger they'll disperse the muzz-cloud, waft it away on a flurry of wings so bunch up tight to retain the entity, hang on till they've inspected the mortal remains and hope they don't notice the fleck of red in the straggle of hair by the boulders. If they do you'll be sunk because they'll all start then in a chattering swarm and there'll only be wide-hipped woman bones clean on the beach.

No pain, though, because of the still-fibred nerves; but it would be nicer to get back in charge again to a going concern and be respirated by blueshirt so that you could sit up and straighten the clothes and thank him for being so prompt.

After a time a cigarette, perhaps, because he's got some even if they are a bit squashed.

But he's back to the sparkle of water now and once he gets on to that he just goes on and on. Stupidly gazing into the light like a child at a dangling pocket-watch. Carry on like that for minutes on end but you can make him aware of the stones that press in his bony bottom and he'll maybe find them and throw them down like a man would; try to hit something. Never really grow up in spite of the roughening chin and the wrinkling brow. Must have been throwing stones when he was three and a half and here he is standing with a man's eye ranging the shore for a target. If he hits what he's aiming at he'll be in a good temper for the rest of the day and probably wee-wee over the side without worrying at all about getting it pecked off.

Stockings are draggled around the knee and heaven knows where the shoes are but they're details when you're trying to latch on to the pebble-throwing child up there to come down and get the inertion moving again although it would be nicer if the fully-fashioned clung better even if you are drowned. Infuriating if you get him down risking his neck on the cliff descent and he finds you undelectable.

Logic about how you wouldn't go swimming in stockings is masterful. So serious, too, but now that he's woken up to the situation he'll go into everything pretty carefully before he makes up his mind.

Suddenly you want terribly to inhabit the body again and

be back where you were before the horizon came up on all sides over the hair. Want to get back to it all urgently. Mustn't for God's sake just melt away like this into nothing. Want to be back in the nice body and straighten the stockings; to reach back into the lovely world and sun yourself and go shopping and catch trains and go away for week-ends and have your watch repaired and get a smile from the milkman and spread dress patterns all over the floor and get that new suspender belt and go to the Natural History Museum and have people in to tea on Saturdays.

Blueshirt must come, must come down and try to get the body back to its rhythm and the warm breathing. Can't go wandering off when there's a nice girl lying drowned.

Mindcloud dances, shimmers, agitates; silently screams for the help for the battered body.

You can hear it from a hundred yards back into the landscape and the trudge of the feet through the grass gets softer; sun burns a hole in the spineless spine and you stop in the rhythm of the walking feet and the sound of the heart is nearer and louder than all the grasshoppers and you screw round over the shoulder, hands in the pockets and look at the grass that mounts to a sudden stop in the sky, ragged against the blue.

Panicking wail of the near-dead mindmuzz ripples up over the lip of the cliff and you see the pull that drags the head round and stops the feet in the grey-green grass. Pull spreads out in the sky in concentric circles of helplessness. You gotter go back.

Ridiculous because of the time she must have been lying there. You can only bring them back when you've got them fresh out of some river and the life's still nestling somewhere in them.

Feet turn round and go back into the sun and you can feel the smooth mechanics of the reluctant thighs with palms of the pocketed hands and the shirt-button glints and the breeze blows into the flies.

Like the time when the village policeman shoved off in a punt and you came by and saw him sitting there in his shirt-

sleeves in the afternoon with a rope and a kind of a four-pronged anchor at the end. Kept on lobbing it out into the smooth of the water and gradually drawing it back to the punt with his head cocked sideways like a blind man listening and each time it came up he looked at the prongs for the fragment of swimsuit or the ravel of flesh. Gawpers gathered on the edge all watching and they said it had only just happened and there might be a chance.

Still white form on the bottom of the pond suddenly silenced in its afternoon laughter and draggle-headed bathers whispering awe-filled at the quiet death lying fresh in the middle. Down with a laugh and he hadn't come up and they'd dived a bit and someone had gone for a copper and here it all was.

Pondweed all about the place and the water was dark but you strained the eyes and you tried to get through to the place where the body lay, tried to make it suddenly transparent so that all you had to do was splosh in and hoist it out, but the water was dark and there's much more water than you'd think when you're looking for a boy gone bathing. Draggled about on the edge the rest, and dripped on the council's asphalt and just waited. Copper on a country bicycle up to the edge calmly with a couple of hanks of rope and two more drag-hooks and he laid them in the grass and interminably took off his helmet and jacket and called to the midpond copper to come over with the bloody punt and he'll have a go too.

Punt over the slimy surface unhurried as the life ebbed out of the waiting body beneath and you wanted to hurry the whole thing up and you picked up one of the hooks unasking and waited at the side of the smell of the sweat of the constable. No word anywhere and the boat flatted into the side and you waited for the copper to hop and gave the bloody thing a flying start as you followed him on. Unravelled the hank as the drifting three came over the point of the nub of the pond. Sploshed out far with the galvanized prongs, all together, like sudden antennae and may the best man win.

Pulled at the weedgreen rope that dripped in the punt as you hauled and you got the bucketing rockle of pond-wrack

under the drag of the hook. But nothing soft. Nothing to get life back into. And each time you got a feeling of something caught in the prongs you closed the mouth tight in case the others should hear the heartbeat. Dragged in slowly on the wet rope and each time nothing and the boy was calling out to the blind ones on the high-hung punt to try a bit more over here. But hooks just went on sploshing out regardless and you hoped like hell that this new splosh wouldn't end up with the horror of hook-punctured body asprawl in the bottom of the punt, and pondweed dripping from the mouth.

Went on silently for a long time in the shade of the oak-trees with the scatter of aprons and shirtsleeves staring from the side.

Chalk kicks up in the grass in sudden puffs like gunfire seen from a safe hilltop and if you tune in to the grasshopper frequency you get every other noise blotted out, like an engineer with his hand on the volume control and the red light flicks and he swings it up. The mind at the top of the spine is the volume control because you don't get a thing when you're in the punt. All quiet with waiting; no grasshopper fizz.

Tripartite splay of hooks from the punt in the tall trees' shadow and the sun glints through the tracery leaves, glints through to a dapple on the water and shows up the bright pea-green in patches. Unevenly out from the punt the hooks, one's sploshing out while you're hauling in and the punt gyrates on the still surface.

You're tuned in to the high-pitched shrill of the call of the dead from under the green but you don't get a sound.

Splosh out and it goes further than you expected and you start on the long haul in and your spine prickles with the sudden feel of a cushioned tug at the end of the line and you're afraid you've got him. Coppers carry on grunting in their shirt-sleeves unaware and you keep your mouth shut and pull some more, gently so as not to impale him and you go sick as you fear it might be in his poor bloody mouth and you slack the pull and try to see through the thick of the water but you can't get through and suddenly quietly the copper's voice.

'Ere 'e is! and you look round from your false alarm and go sick again as the white shows indistinctly through the green and you can't see which way up the poor bugger is. Surprisingly light on the end of the hook when you go with the other guy to help and nobody says anything as you ladle him over the side and he thuds on the boards in a draggle of weed and you pole like hell for the asphalt.

Babble and moan from the waiting group and you hop off quick and nobody wants to ruin his jacket with pondslime so you whip off yours for something to do and you bolster it into a heap for the shock of the head to the hard and the coppers drip over with the limb-dangled swimsuit and they just dump him down on the asphalt. No jacket for the head.

No talking; they watch from a distance as the big copper straddles the motionless white. Head twist to one side and a trickle comes out and you look away but the copper ham-hands the pressure to the flanks and leans hard forward, rhythmically kneading.

Rhythmically, backwards and forwards to a steady beat like the instruction book says and he just goes on calmly regardless. Pick up the jacket and unwrap the headsoft cushion for the poor bastard and you don't know what the hell to do now. Can't linger the agony of whether they'll bring him to life. Can't stand willing the breath to the limp wet lungs, like people help by grunting for you when you're trying to untighten a screw. Can't stand and look at the line of sweat on the constabular forehead.

Remarkable how they're so often bald under the helmet without your guessing.

Artificial respiration was administered for two hours but efforts to revive the boy were unavailing.

Not for two hours you can't. Better shove off and leave them to it. They'll relieve each other at the kneading and you're as too many as the whispering villagers who crowd and stand like cumulus waiting. Shove off and come back in an hour or so to see whether the miracle's wrought on the asphalt.

Edge of the grass is almost here and you've gotter lob over

and see about it. Gotter find a scramble-channel down the chalk where the rainwater has spewed over maybe, gulched over and chined out a cleft in the chalk like you see sometimes in the face of a dockhand or a man who's had the weather on him. Deep-etched in a running line from under the eyes to the jawline, vertical as though they were there to collect some secret tears and carry them discreetly away before you noticed the infra dignity of crying dockers.

Docker-faced cliff beneath stands firm in the weathering breeze. No tears now. Dry cataract channels firm in the hard of the chalk and all you've gotter do is find somewhere where it isn't too firkin steep. Where you won't go bravely quivering over and stay stuck for a coupla weeks because you hadn't planned the thing out before you started. Maybe a fissure somewhere; sort of a crack. Where you can slither your backside down one side with the feet splayed out on the opposite wall, edging down like they do to rescue the dog-team and the pemmican and the aneroid barometers. And the gramophone records of Dame Nellie Melba singing 'Abide With Me'. Down wedgewise with the knobs on the spine bones scraping their way through the flesh and the taut-strung hamstrings wondering what the hell is happening.

Kind of an open chimney in the chalk; but you don't get much of that in chalk.

Along by the edge and the grass sinks under the shoes and you're not sure whether it's grass that sinks or the crumbling edge and you sheer off quick to a yard away with a mindful of cracking cliff and the hurtling self to the shore. Attention away from the agoning mindful, eyes to the raggle of edge-track wander. Wiggles out wide in a curve to the distance out to the flank of the seascape. Along the edge with the breeze in the ears and there's maybe a place for legs over and then the centre of gravity and then the whole trembling outfit in some accidental wiggle that you don't get yet in the foreground detail. Some way down for sure, because people must have been down; can't stay up on the edge all your life. Way down with steps, maybe; cut all nicely and hollowed smooth with the tread of lovers and

smugglers and coastguards. Easy way out instead of the shortcut line of most resistance. Curved and hollowed with hundreds of years of feet and called locally by somebody's name because he built them into the solid chalk, hacked them out with a woodman's axe because he'd built a boat on the cliff and couldn't get down and got annoyed and took the axe and rampaged his way down and when he'd finished them he walked back up them and put the boat on his shoulders and humped off down again to the sea with it. Put out into the bay and rowed and rowed until he was a dot and never came back. Name was Ephraim and they call them Ephraims till this very day, but nobody can remember why.

You get them everywhere in cliffs; like that lot in Bonifacio where the garrison didn't know that the stairway had been even thought of until the boys nipped up in the night on the night-cut treads and took the town with its backside bare. Hundreds of Ephraims chipping and chiselling upwards, smiling up the homemade staircase till they spewed out into the cliff-hung town and raised all hell with their enterprise. All hell in some Corsican night while maybe Milton wondered whether he could get away with *yclept* and slipped off into sighted dreams of Cerberus; while maybe the girl in the rough brown dress turned over in her cottage cot and thought of cliffs and blackest midnight. All going on at the same time but nobody knew because of the separate threads. Threads won't intermingle but you get a kind of cross-current when you stand well back and screw up the mind's-eye. Retrospective, but you get it. You could get it for this moment, too, for this cliff-moment if you could stand well back enough. Maybe someone in Ankara now with cliffsteps on the brain and doesn't know why he's got it. Biting his nails with uneasy thoughts of woman drowned on seashore and it's one of those things you get in your head and it'll go off in a minute. Or a policeman in Cincinatti with a sudden headswim in the middle of the traffic. Or a snackbar counterhand watching the wiggle of the line of the crack in the floor's mosaic. Under the morning electric light and there are muffled-up men with pemmican boxes and gramophone

records shouting to each other in the crevasse in the floor's mosaic.

No steps.

Downward lob to the grass while the will's not looking; head out over the edge to get the feel of what it'll be when you've said goodbye to the wide *querencia*. Warmth comes through from the grass to the pressing chest, invites the will to a long-drawn muzz-dream but eyes keep alive and you've already got the body over in mind's-eye. Ledges and crannies and footholds and straggles of green and you watch the figure go down reluctant, fingers over the edge and white face upturned. Looking up at you frightened, but his feet scrape into the chalk and he's found a shelf. Two inches of shelf for the toepoint and one of the hands relaxes a bit as the toepoint presses, shifts suddenly on to the face of the wall for a cling of weed and the head goes down to look for the next step downward. Knuckles yellowing under the flesh in the hand that clings to the brink and you can see the tremor and shift as the weight of the body goes to the two-inch toepoint. Just under your nose, four fingers pressed and the grunts coming up from under the sun on the tangled hair. Fearful and sweating but the probing leg finds chalkhold and the fingers strike out of the furrowing grass and latch on to somewhere you can't see because it's under the lip of the land. Fearful and sweating but he's started now in a sort of numbness and courage is only cunning once you've begun. Cunning and grunting over the face of the cliff.

Legs hoik in from behind and you splosh them over the side before they can object, bumping the fringe with sudden backside; quick roll over so that the eyes don't focus sharp on the sand and you've got the legs over up to the backside instep. Nose to the grass and elbows spread and hands getting ready to go into action for the last reluctting; backside out over nothing and the legs obediently dangle awaiting the further decision of the rest of you. This is what it feels like to be a coward. Toes in to the invisible chalk exploring but it feels as smooth as you knew it was going to feel. Six inches away the friendly grass but

you've gotter keep slithering over now it's begun, gotter watch the edging away of the mingling spikes and wriggle out into nothing with the sun beating on the seat of the pants and the draught up the legs and the edge-pressing cliff-fringe creeping up past the navel until the gravity point goes over too and there's more of you off than on. Elbows dig in and hands take fright. Suddenly you're prickling perpendickling with only the chin and elbows left for a decision to call the whole thing off; scrabble out sideways now with the toes for holy God's sake, scrabble and kick at the chalk while the elbow-points still hold. Landscape jumps with the pumping fear that threads the head and you gaze from your worm's-eye vantage back at the lovely shrub with the dried out pee-leaves but the sight is sightless because of the downward backward yearn of the mind for the toepoint ledge. Like a man goes blind to Hyde Park passing when the urgency's on him. Out sideways but smooth and the sight goes colour-drained and you get an overdose of prickling out from the nape of the neck, spreading hoodwise over the crown and the shoulders, urgently reasoning, quietly screaming its head off.

Once it was a skylight you were flopping and dangling through and she'd put the steps under where she thought your foot would come and you couldn't feel it anywhere as you pressed your chin into the smoky tiles and there was no more of you to uncoil and you were bloody sure there was no steps there at all but she insisted and grabbed the flailing leg and gently pulled it three sixteenths of an inch and you were all firm and cocky again on the stepladder top. Like that, only now no womanhand for the extra three sixteenths.

All naked the back to the wide sky and no ledge.

No eyes in the toes to spy out crannies to walk on.

You can feel the sweat break out like a creeping rash; prickling in the scalp spreads out from the midline whorl of the sunburnt hair and links the ears in panic. Eyes on the jumping pee-spot carry on looking, chin to the green and grasshopper smells in the snuffling nostril but strain in the arms too great and you spread the hands and get ready for slithering cliff-hang

as the body drags. Fore-arms scrape in the grass and grit and you take the weight of everything on the one and grab for the edge with the other. Right hand thick hand strong hand firm on the edge and the chin goes down and you're breathing into the chalk. Intimate nose to the cliff. Body a-dangle and heart going fit to bust with the shirt suddenly damp. No return now that the left arm weak arm thin arm slips. Slips and the hand's to the edge. Both hands to the edge and feet explore in the new chalk further down. Head twist and you can scrape the ear to the chalk and downward look and there's something three sixteenths of an inch beneath. Stuckout lump to the right below the foot. Stuck out for standing flat to the wall and breathing a bit. Gotter go down another three sixteenths for breathing a bit. Have to let go with the left arm weak arm and swing over on to the breather. Leggo the hand and the thick arm takes it all. Pain from the thick arm. Pain and you'll have to leggo. Can't look down for the jutting breather and you'll have to bloody well leggo with the pain. Never built for the job. Streaks and sinews of tearing hurt yelling out from the arm not built for the job and the nose runs. Wet on the lip with nose-run. Snuff in the nose-run but it's gone too far and you snuff out again and it bubbles loudly against the chalk. Typical. Arm ripping out and nose-run.

Pain white-hot in the arm.

Hammering in the headback but you can stand it if you pay no regard. Stand it and swing by the dead thick arm till you've made up your clear mind what you're going to do next. Only way to stand it. Pay no regard. Mind cut off from the deltoid upwards. Few more moments now. Few more seconds for the deltoid upwards.

Toepoint down as far as the hinge will go and the shoecap juds on the beautiful footplace. Beautiful God-put footplace. Still can't look but the foot yells out it's a footplace. Welling of footyell up from the thanking foot and you unknuckle the deadening hand from the death-hold. Unhook and the body scrapes down to its strengthening pivot of footplace. Hands now to the chalk and snuffle of bubbling nose-run loud in the ear.

Loud in the pounding ear with everything poised on the foot-spot breather.

Aeroplane skyhigh sounding over the pounding suddenly and you want to look. Want to look. Screw the neck round from the breast of the mother-chalk and look up relaxed. Coming in to the baysky wide behind the ears but the head is fixed. Noise nostalgic like lawn-mowers heard on a summer Sunday; dreamy hum you mix with bee-buzz when clouds go over and the palms are flat to the garden.

The long hours cliff-sat and no buzz in the sky of the bay till now and you can't look round.

If you could look round it would be nice to see the point of the hum in the blue but the foot is taking the weight and the cliff is close to the bubbling nose. Inwards the aeroplane, over and nearer secretly, in over the draughty back of the shirt and the prickling hair. People up there unprickly, composed, with lacery tracery fluffs flicking by and covert eyes for the safety-belt. No draught in the shirt.

Would like to look round because nothing has escaped the scan of the baywide sight till this. Would very much like to look round.

No move to the head for fear of the sudden slide. No move but the eyes down and you get the throb of the cheeks. In and out of the chest and the chalk-pressed belly and the trouser-leg flapping, obscuring the vital point of the toe that's taking the strain. Cliff swells out below but vague and you'll have to risk the next step when the legstrain gives. Have to shift and slither and sidle spreadeagled and ought never to have started the whole unnecessary thing. Chalk cool; blue in the head-shadow, and you can stretch back the focus of the eye to get the detail of the geography, pull it in sharp and see what goes on three inches away. Eyes converge for the image of cliff-face close-up but you can't hold it for long and they spread again and you get the comfortable double-up blurr. Chalk-cool blurr. Cheek goes on to the rough of the blurry blue.

Drones over louder, insistent, but the slightest shift would ruin the balance and you're left anonymous. If they spotted

you they could peel off down and zoom off out again over the sea and switch off suddenly when they were a quarter of a mile behind the nape of the neck and glide in quiet on a thermal and shout encouragement and point out ledges beneath like she did with the step-ladder. Glide up with the air whining in the idle propellers and whiffle the hair as they went up over the edge to the quietly waiting grasshoppers. But it's like an itch in the small of the back that you can't get at. Buzzing between the shoulder blades. Straight over the top unregarding. You'll be left on the lonely wall when it's gone. Left clinging and the ridiculous bubbling nose.

Hands drag down and you press with the bent-over flap of the ear to the chalk. Fingers over the rivvles and runulets feel for the outjut prod of the white. Feel for your life for finger-nail chink. But smooth. Roundels of weather-worn jutlets, but smooth; no ledge.

Now downstretch hands with the bubbling face quick-breathing. Downstretch and you've got something. Got something. Holy lovely God, you got something. Been there all the time unspeaking. Weight from the dithering leg release and the hand can take it. Weight to the thankful hand on the ledge and the groan comes out surprising. Groan been waiting to come out and you can slither a bit now that it's come surprisingly out. Slither beneath the handledge in the echo of the surprise of groan. Slither before you consider and you swing down and the chalk swings up in a blear and the scrape of the upward rub to the shirt and knee comes loud and hang on tight to the bloody chalklump. Hang on and look down with the knees astride and there's a helluva lotter cliff walkable suddenly. Walkable with a quick drop so hands unclasp and more blear and you're on a sizeable shelf.

Unthinkable drop and you're okay with a jolt that rattles up the spine like the clink-clank travels up the line of goods wagons. Shakes the living daylights and elbows cold where the skin's gone. Cold where the skin's gone; raw meat patches neat on the points but thank you God for a lovely ledge.

Breathing like hell again to the wall but you can turn now

and the breathing's quieter as you look out over the bay. Not quieter really but gets mixed up with the flying air. Exaggerated when the nose pokes into the cliff but you hardly heard what a row it was because of the dithering leg. Can turn now out to the bay. Can turn freely. Can stand on the walkable ledge and turn and move about and lean and stoop and rub the arms. Stand on the after-dither of the legs and smear off the nose-run and breathe a bit. Thick of the thumb-shaft dark with white striations; nose-run smears in the thumbdust. Rough of the chalk-white trousers and the thumb is tingling dry.

Stoop with nobbles of spine to the wall, knees take elbows neatly and you undither fingers by interknuckling; chin prop. Chalk smell. Chin to the white striations tingles; elbows chilled to the smarting breeze. No buzz now above the shimmer. No glitter of wingspan. Planeless blue outspread all silent. No ship. No popple of slicing bows, no engine-room ting, no gurgling radio. Only the heaven-sound singing out skywide over the bay and the jump in the eyes and ears from fear still yelling within.

Narrower now, the plane of the bay to the throbbing eye because of the coupla yards you've come from the top. Further down the narrower until when you get with the feet to the sand there'll be only a strip from the nose to the skyline, all packed in; miles and gallons crammed tight in two or three inches. Eye-point shift from the top to here makes the scape of the bay unfamiliar. Been looking for hours from the top and the image is delved on the back of the eyeball, scorched in deep like the sun makes newspapers go yellow. Hundred and twenty million cells at the back of each eye and they've got used to the cliff-top sensitization. You could work out the allocation of cells if you had the time, so many for the water, so many for the sky, and two hundred and seventy-three and a half thousand for odd-ments like rocks and shore and seagulls and the bridge of the nose out of focus. And some for the peripheral eyebrows and cheeks. (And some for the foot coming out from under the boulder but carry on thinking about allocating cells.) Carry on hard about the cells. Something about rods and cones, too, and visual purple, but we needn't go into that. Just the disposition

of the elements forming the image and the number of cells touched off by the sparkle, for example. After the eye has been at it all morning it gets used to the set-up and hardly pays any more attention, keeps on registering the same almost without reference. Only when you lob down a bit that the cell-count changes and you gotter get used to a new bay and a new heaven and a new earth. Carry on about the cells. Carry on because when the foot comes focussing in you get aurora borealis in the chest. Brain not dead to the jag of foot; still jangles and squirms like they say sensitive plants do when you touch them with a stick although you've never actually seen it. Never seen the vegetable embarrassment when you tickle them. Must laugh like hell with a raucous greenery cackle that's out of our wavelength and all the other plants join the stinking chlorophyl chorus and the woods echo to their earth-mirth. Tall woods pretending not to hear the vulgarity like deacons blind to obscenity scrawls on the walls of the vestry lavatory. Deaf to choir-boys' slap-happy slap and cackle, just marry on regardless, but easy on with the confetti.

In the trouser turn-ups and in your wallet and you take off your shoes in the expensive hotel and there's some in there; and she even finds some in her knickers but doesn't say anything about it and you find a rice-grain in the forest that harbours the plant that jangles and squirms like they say they do when you touch it with a stick.

Heart still going but not so obvious and the ball of the thumb doesn't tingle so hard if you keep it out of the wind.

Think out over the sea and round about but you always come back to under the skirt in the end. Even stuck solitary cliff-ledged you come round to it. Thank God that there's always under the skirt to come round to in the end. Even vicars think of knickers.

Better not look beneath the lip of the ledge because it's certain to slope off back and under and you'll get screaming guts-ache thinking of how the molecules support each other and whether they'll hold. Look sideways out from the chin-rest without moving in case a sudden shift should set the molecules

fidgeting. Eyes to the edge of the ledge and along a bit and the wall of the chalk meets the edge a yard away. No road. More probable the other way where it's crumbly ragged and the ledge peters out sort of gradually. Eyes to the petering out and it's no good thinking too long or you'll get transfixed with considering. Gotter move before fright sets in again, gotter follow the track of the eye with the body without going into details.

Up on the heels. Horizon swings up as you rise. Comes up in perfect synchronism with the head and the bay stretches out again. Hands to the warm of the wall behind and you ginger along. Steadfast the eyes on the chalk instead of the sand below that you get only peripherally. No need to look at the sand.

Steady as she goes. . . .

But the hair is scraped by the outtilt wall where it overhangs. Scraped and you leave particles of head for a souvenir but no time to look up for the remnant streaked on the crag. Probably smaller than it feels, anyway, like a hollow tooth is, but the breeze cools the juices unlocked by the scrape and it feels like half the scalp is gone. Gotter shorten the neck; gotter hunch up the back to save the rest of the juices. Hang on with the flat of the fingers firm on the wall and the neck crunched up because of the juices.

Now sideways gently with shuffling feet. Sideways with the feet but shoulders flat to the wall, eyes lidded to the frightening ledge, all else excluded in case of headswim and just plain panic. Possess yourself with the must of moving. Must keep moving gotter keep moving mustn't look up at the empty forwards . . . gotter keep moving or reason'll get you and you'll figure it out as impossible and break up into a quake of reasonable terror, gotter keep the must of moving. . . . sort of hypnosis to shuffle you on as the brow-juice dries in the air and the knees go uncertain.

Now only the blue shirt chest between the eye and the shore. Only the shirt with uncertain knees beneath and then the sand waiting out of focus and jiggling each time the heart goes.

You can't go on like this.

Thankfully breaks the numb hypnosis.

Can't go on, sweet God. Gotter stop. Must stop and the muscles tense and the fingers splay behind. A coward and it isn't reasonable for cowards to go on when reason makes them stop. Not reasonable.

Stop.

Hunch on the ledge with the fingers splayed behind and stop. No shuffling foot after sideways foot. Breathe deep, open gasp the coward mouth and succumb the eyes to bayscape; let go the must and catch on to the lovely cowardice. Sweet cowardice, body trembling and mouth dry with the air in it and cowardice is truly sweet. Neither up nor down nor sideways and you're fixed lonely on the wall. Lonely crucified with the knees bent and the neck hunched, flat hands to the chalk and a dither is starting behind the knees that'll spread in a coupla seconds all over the coward. Nerves. That's all it is. Little stringy jitterers that you can tag out with forceps and knot the ends of during operations. No, veins. Veins you knot the ends of.

Feet'll go numb if you don't shift the weight like they do on guard-duty. Numb but with a white pain slicing up the back of the legs. Gotter shift the numbable feet.

Neither up nor down nor sideways.

But back to the broader stretch of the ledge, you might. Might make it even with the sagging knees and the drying tongue. Sort of sideways flop back to the broader bit, it'll have to be. Only way. Dither all over now and the feet wouldn't function if you tried to inch it back. Can't stop the dither. Can't grip hold of the twitchering network under the skin; can't stop it. They say your whole life passes through your mind. Can't stop it like the vibration you get when a car starts to judder at speed. Self generating.

Brain calmly under the hair goes on. Goes on even with the coward juddering. Quite still. You can think of anything you like as though you were cut off from the quaking, sort of shock-absorbed, like they have radios in tanks; unjiggled. Cushioned in inches of foam-rubber under the skull, all those valves and nerves and vein-endings; carry on efficiently until

the last possible moment. Like an electronic computer in a house on fire.

Terrified and twitchering and pain up the back of the legs.

Think of anything you like, quite cool.

For example the confusion you get when a Czech says t'. So far back the tongue occlusion that the Englishman hears k. Psychological, really, but the Czech doesn't know what all the fuss is about. You write it with a t don't you? Over the dithering and spite of the chattering nerve-endings you've got it sorted out. No trouble at all. Elektrické dráhy hlávniho mésto práhy. Vy jedete do Václavské Námesti? Ano. Tak jedete, a honem. Czech. A joke, because the man who asked whether it went to Václavské Námesti had been sitting in the bloody bus in a traffic jam for twenty minutes. You laugh twice as loud at a foreign joke. You could have died laughing in the total absence of dithering to prove how clearly you understood. 1938 that was with people buying gasmasks and sailing canoes down the Vltava and eating sausages with hořčice. Very tricky that hořčice. Not many foreigners can do it but never gave you any trouble. You said it reflectively and impeccably to yourself as you knelt in the dust of the attic and looked through the crack in the eaves out into the sunshine as the soldiers marched over the Morava. Great curving iron bridge, and they broke step because they would have swung it out of its sockets and into the river if they hadn't. Into the river, floundering, with long live Beneš in white on the concrete banks. Knelt in the dust cowardly and said hořčice to yourself in the attic. But perfectly.

This is the past life flashing before you.

Better stop.

Only did it to show the remotion and calm of the mind. Stop now and ready for the sideways flop to the broad of the ledge.

And there was a cretin boy who marched up and down the column of dumb-numb soldiers inspecting them. Wrong in the head and happy in the Moravian sun with the glint all multiplicating on the rhythmic bayonets.

There was a looney-bin tagged on to the park and you took

her in the park and sat with her under the wall and talked of Europe and what the hell would happen about it all and you could hear the yells from the other side of the wall where the loonies were. Shouting they were and there was the sound of birds mixed up with it and for some reason you took off your shoes and she laughed at your doing it at a time like that and you felt the grit of the path through your socks and the warmth coming in and there was fine white blossom scattered everywhere. That was a beautiful May, all riven with fear and charm and mobilization and the powdery baby smell of her body. And the radio saying Everywhere on the frontier, all is quiet. Every half hour. And names being painted out over shops in Brno because they were Jewish and the Jews carried the paint pots as though they'd been painting out their names since Europe started. Kind of quiet and resigned.

Twitching the fingers now.

But Brno still coming in loud and clear. Still quiet and resigned the paint-pot-carrying ones and fresh the sparkle of broken glass in the gutters and the staffcar's roar on the Sunday morning cobbles. Broken glass because of the raging night before that you wouldn't have guessed from the calm respectonymity of everyone standing around and separating when the car came screaming through like a scythe.

Seagull.

Sick on the sawdust floor of the Královska dive with too much slivovic drunk on an empty belly after thirty-six hours in the same carriage from Flushing to Prague and they kept giving you salted almonds to quench the hunger. She wasn't there to see you sick so nobody minded and you just went on as though nothing had happened after the beautiful creature had come with the bucket of sawdust and stuff to clear it up. Took the sick and the sawdust away to the bawdy sound and the swirl and stomp of old Bohemian hudba; threaded through the dancing mob with English sick for an old Bohemian dustbin. Gave her five crowns for the hazy shame of carrying English sick. The carriage had Prague written on it even when it was standing at Flushing and it went on saying it in the same red

letters all the way. Marvellous how they know. It said Praag, though. In Dutch because of it started in Flushing.

Sidling and gimbling on the wind, looking at you.

Vlissingen in Dutch. Must have been detoured through German to end up as Flushing in Dover. Like we got Vienna from Italy most probably because they say Veen and only the wops would have put the vowel at the end. Or maybe the French gave it vee-enn and we threw in the 'a' to round off the job. You could size it all up from old maps and things. Somebody already has, bound to. Prague, too, there's another; must have come from the Russians because of Praha changing to Praga like they do with hranic and granic and hrad and gorod and hovno and govno. You can figure these things out.

It's the one from the bloody boulder come up to see you break your neck. Wings idling on the cushioning air, hardly astir as it rides on the inswept aerodynamics.

Reasonable for Vlieschingen to become Flushing. Unless maybe it had an intermediary stage, even in English, when they wrote it Flusching. Or Flisching. Could check it on old maps and bills of lading. The whole thing is an interpenetrative network of logic. You could practically construct some of these languages from the evidence of the leftovers; like Icelandic from Danish and Swedish and Norwegian. Practically make it up as you go along. All members of a secret society without knowing it. Branches everywhere. Finster in Welsh and fenster in German. Bairn in Scottish and barn in Norwegian. Like the ramifications and interconminglings you get with bronchial tubes and grapevines and tributaries and nervous systems. All the same; same basic plan like waves in heat light and sound; and balance that you get in civil engineering and poetry and icicles and bicycles and music and anatomy and flowers and seagulls.

White against the blue but because of the sun behind it goes darker by contrast. The actual colour is known from experience so that on a first impulse you'd probably start painting it white, but the visual effect is damn nearly black because of the tonal brightness of the background. Would only go white if you used an orange filter to get the blue looking dark like they do in

tourist pictures for selling Switzerland. White cumulus on black velvet sky and you've practically paid your deposit.

In Switzerland they speak French, German, Italian, Switzer-Teutsch and cantonese.

You get a flashing on the wings though, a vlaschingen, when the sun catches them at the angle of incidence. Then it's the sun you see really, like you do in a mirror, not the wing. Just the reflected sun. Swooping and wheeling, but mostly gliding and gloating. Head on the ball and socket swivelling.

If the knees give way suddenly there'll be no time for ledgeward spill, no time to get it organized. Everything speeds up. Building up to the big fright. Decision is all you need. Gotter decide. There's a pin-pointed second screaming up any moment now and it's the one when you'll risk it but you don't know which one it'll be yet because you haven't decided. Everything speeds up and there's no time for decision, the seconds come faster and the moment is getting nearer and there are plenty of things to think of before you decide, like getting up in the morning when you've gotter get up but you've got things you gotter think and the reality of the dream can be held indefinitely before the eyes open on to the old reality. Back into the sidestreet of time, unurgent, that's where you want to get. No insistent chronology in dreams, no consecutive this then that. It's as and when and you can come back to what you want to leave off, come back or have it at the same time, superimposed but separate. Time is an artificial Genevese convention.

An old Cantonese custom

An old Spanish customer

The convention will be held (aura lieu) in the customs hall.

Transfixed the coward on the chalk and he gets foreshortened as you lose height. Foreshortened so that his heels disappear under the forward edge of the ledge and his knees look bigger than his head. You can see the uvula hanging dry in the velar palate and you could peck it out easy but you sweep and glide on the upsurge and the knees go smaller and now it's the top of the head that's larger, the image swaying and shifting

like a film of battleships taken from a rowboat but the movement's smoother, sweepier because it's air, not water. Peel off away and the face of the cliff zooms up and round diagonally and you can feel and hear the caress of the bolstering air in the outspread wingshapes as you dive for the shore that largens, boldens, races up and the boulders largen, bolden, peel off and swing out of sight and now it's the sea that fills the swerving picture. Fast out, fast out from the blueshirt, fast away from diminishing cliff-face, outward scud to the popple and glitter, blown and carried. Too high for the glistening surface detail but you can spot any change that breaks the water and skelter down the invisible airways with beak and eye for the kill. Smoothly ride the falling corridors, sail the lifting sweeps of upthrust, spindle, waver and turn in suspended motion and roundward flick the ball-and-socket to see how small the cliffs are. Streaking white in the sun in the distance, no gimbling movement from here; too far for the swoop and wheel to unsteady the image, just white streaked across and somewhere on it the unseen blueshirt blubbers and beneath the body lies. Distant and small the tiny comedy. Scarcely a pinpoint between them in the spreading seascan, but they're not together yet, nor won't be if he drags on dry-mouthed dithering.

Dry-mouthed you drag on dithering with the eye fixed firm on diminishing speck of gullswoop. Dry-mouthed and the flattened palms are numb from chalk touch but you're clamped in the grip of vacancy that swells up over like the fierce sigh you get when you hold a shell to your ear. Locked in jaw-dropped dumb transfixture.

and suddenly the trembling's gone.

Suddenly still in the burning white of the cliff.

Surprise at the back of the head somewhere but the eye still strains to the distant speck that wallows and swirls and only half the brain's surprised. Sometimes lost when the thin of the wing is all you get but each change of flight gives the thickness and breadth and there's more to catch in the bank of photo-cerebral cells in the eye-back.

Come back, seagull.

But the eyes have started to water with the effort and you unhook the long-held focus and the distant image doubles and splurges, merges in the watery eyeball and you blink tight to squeeze it out and the eyes are fresh in the air with a tear on the warm cheek.

Head turn to the ledge that's broader and still there for slumping sideways on to. Any moment now.

Seascape smears in a wild blear and you're losing the balance before you've made up your mind. Coming up at you the ledge but you're going to hit it unready and there's nothing to bloody well grab and they say your life flashes before you but the hand is there before you asked it, hand and the forearm with a flat dead clunk to the ledge and the rest of you swinging unheld. Swinging free and you're grunting, kind of moaning with the chin pressed hard to the flesh of the forearm. Didn't hear the moan till you stopped to listen. Tuft of grass growing out of the chalk in front of your eyes is the last thing you'll take a good look at on earth if the other hand doesn't come up to take the weight. Like a straggle of canvas edging in the plaster of Paris, or probably papier mâché they'd use to get the effect, sploshed over with whitewash and then drip water trails down from a hosepipe above to get the runnels and tear-stains. Back up the whole thing on stout wire netting that you'd nail to a rough framework of two by two. Irregular, random, the configuration; you couldn't draw it and plan it out. You'd have to hammer and nail the framework together on the spur of the moment to get the natural effect. Huge undertaking. Cliff must be two hundred feet high.

Left hand skinny hand works its way up and now it's evenly distributed, the weight. No groaning. Just quietly looking at grass-tuft sunning itself on the ledge.

From the pressure on the belly and knees and toes it feels there may be an outward slope beneath. Not just a screaming drop, but a gentle slide you could slither on, maybe. There's an organ somewhere in the body that tells you where your feet are even when you're not looking at them and this organ is unfrightened about letting go with the hand and forearm because

the points of the shoes are maybe nine inches further out to sea than the point of the chin. You can figure it all out but it's this organ somewhere that does it. Like the semicircular canals that you wouldn't know you'd got if they didn't show you drawings. Gentle slope instead of a screaming drop but you don't know how far down it stays gentle. But you can screw over on your back once you've let go and sort out the position in transit. Screw over quick as you let go.

Grass-tuft stirs in the wind unheeding the face and the flat-slapped forearm. Carries on growing. Sits at its appointed station and works out its salvegetation. Probably a grasshopper stuck in the cool of the grasstuft heart, patiently waiting for the intruding face to fall off backwards over the side, star-sploshed on to the sand so that it can get on with the business of being tucked in the heart of a grasstuft all unobserved. Ancient lights. Grasshoppers at work. Keep clear of twin propellers. You could make a perfect three-point landing if you had twin propellers.

Unthinking you take everything by surprise and the grip relaxes and it's either okay for a slide or a screaming drop. No thinking. Trousers rivvle into the crutch with the upward drag of the chalk and more green goes by and the out-turned shoes take the rough of the slide and the shirt's dragged out and the belly's bare to the scraping wall but you're still in contact and the legs stretch for the touch of the shoe-felt rough of the slide. Points of the elbows skimmed afresh but you're okay and the slump of the downward movement's almost over. Gentle slither, slow slither. Belly slither stops. Stops quite still and you're breathing into grass. Knees hot with friction.

Quiet again after the noise in the ears and head and scorching body.

Quite still.

Only the hot of the belly and knees to the slide and familiar breathing into the cliff. But grass now. Cool and dampish grass-smell. Placid green for the nose to snuffle in and the knees to cool off in. That was a helluva long way.

And the living pulse in throat full bore again.

How the hell they get grass to grow's remarkable. But the

throb in the neck'll bust out if you don't lie still a bit. Just calm and gaze at the cool green. Lie quiet or the banging'll get worse till you won't be able to hear anything else. Not banging with fright, it's the exertion that does it.

Bust out all over the grass and leave you lying around without the necessary pulse. You can disregard the noise of the banging and let it subside while you carry on mulling over something else. If you concentrate on it it gets worse. Psychological. Like people who think they've got cancer and get it. A helluva long way.

If there were a stadium of seventy thousand people behind you watching you'd recover in two seconds. You'd be up on your feet on the slope of grass no matter how loud the banging because it would be unbearable anti-climax for them to sit and wait for the banging to stop. Sit and wait and rattle feet on the hollow boards. You'd get pinpoints of light cropping up all over the crowd where they were lighting cigarettes and waiting. Smoking and stamping their feet. Maybe they wouldn't stamp though, if they realized how tricky that last bit was. Maybe they'd sit quiet and whisper to each other what a great show you put up and how you obviously needed time to get rid of the banging before you got on with the next part. You can never be sure with crowds. From where they are the drop you've come down the cliff-face may seem unspectacular; may seem fiddling. Small because of the distance they are, and they can't be expected to know you're a coward and it's harder for cowards.

Murmuring beginning behind your head as they start to get impatient. There'll be bottles and cushions and corsets bouncing around you like you get at las cinco en punto de la tarde and the murube's undead in the afternoon. It's a semi-circular tribune, built up high at the back, almost on a level with the top of the cliff and it sheers off steep so that they can all get a good view. Built on pylons in the shallow water near the shore, an immense structure that confronts the cliff like the reflector mirror of a spectator projector with the focal point of roaring trained on the small of your back.

You could stop the swelling roar by corroding the stilts of

tubular steel with acid through secret pipelines. All laid on. To each stilt an acid drip and nobody would be any the wiser until the whole thing heeled majestically over in the middle of a roar. Sploshed over backwards into the warm bay. Like the stand did at Tyburn when they were in the middle of hanging somebody and the spectators collapsed just before they got to the hanging and the one whose neck they were breaking laughed and laughed to see such fun. But they hanged him. Only it wasn't into water they fell it was into the Edgware Road. Harder for cowards. Heeled over in the middle of the banging, splosh. That settled them.

But you can afford to lounge about a bit in spectator-absence. Lots of things you do on your own that you wouldn't in front of the tribune like picking your nose or scratching the backside or leaking over a cliff.

You have just done a rather remarkable descent on your belly and you can afford to lounge about a bit.

Settled them and you can muzz into the grass for a bit regardless. Deep into the genuine grass miraculously grown on the barren white. Deep to await the quieting bang of the pulse, but creeping through from the back there's the real delayer appearing.

You don't want to get to the shore.

Don't want it. Didn't want to spill over in the first place. Didn't want to risk the thumping neck and didn't want to carry the neck intact to deal with the shore situation. Didn't want to go down and see about it. Like not getting up in the morning you can spin it out here on your belly so that you never get round to the girlsprawl. Never have to see about it.

Could have been sleeping under the bloody boulder, she could. The whole time. While you were craven up on the ledge just calmly sleeping and she'll wake up when you get across the sand and ask you sweetly what the hell you've been doing to get yourself into this state. Take out stuff from the handbag and start doing herself up calm as you bloody please while you've been needlessly busting a gut. Walk off across the sand to some easy way up that you missed and leave you with the sleeves

flapping and elbows skinned, striations up the ridiculous belly and mouth hung dry. That's what it'll be across the sand. That's what it'll bloody be.

But she's actually dead. You figured it out at the top. Stone dead. Calling on invisible wavelengths. Yet could have been *asleep* on the wavelength and calling. Meandering off like you do in the deathdream and calling from a nightmare she'd got stuck in the middle of like when you think you're awake and you know where your body's lying but you can't shift it and the tongue is locked in the petrified mouth and you call with your mind for someone to come and snap you out of it, call like hell but you can hear that no sound comes and the body's paralysed; can't slip out of the deadlock and everybody goes on regardless while you're locked for the rest of your life with only a silent grunt from under the sternum that takes all your energy and won't come out. Yelling the place down and nobody comes and you're solitary, dying. Could have been that that you heard from under the boulder. They say when you sit and drowse you go off in a kind of a haze and you can pick up scraps that you never get when you're really listening, snatches of people's frightmares and sometimes grasshopper thoughts.

Maybe she slept and dreamt she was drowned and knew that her body was lying under the boulders, thought she was on the way into the last paralysis and yelled invisibly out so that it came up the couple of hundred feet to the top of the cliff and you latched on to her illusion. The whole thing just a mistake that you've got mixed up in. Drowsed on the backside pebbles and mixed with the scream from under her female sternum.

Grass no longer cool. You've been pumping heat into it from the flatspread nose and mouth and chest and arms and belly and loins and thighs and knees and toes. If you were to get up suddenly you'd leave a spreadeagle of heat, manshape, on the grass, that would go on simmering in the sun a quarter of an hour after you'd left it; cruciform pattern of molecular agitting born in the warmth of the sunlit drowse and brought by the trembling body down to be pressed to the breast of the female grass-downed chalk.

If you look round from here you'll be able to see the stuck-out leg now that the banging's subsided. Be able to flick round quick with the nose withdrawn from the warming grass and see whether the dreaming leg has shifted. Only take a flash of the opening eye and flick it quick shut again. Just another coupla moments, though, while the last traces of scaffolding melt in the sea and the whisps of spectators dissolve, all swirling, translucently mushrooming over the bay. Few seconds more and it'll all be gone; unfair to turn now and catch them dissolving. Gone without a trace by the time you turn round but you must give them time for decently wafting, nostalgically rotating.

Calm again now the neck and you don't get any noise louder than the nostril's green roaring.

Thoughts have gone spongy and you've only just realized. You need a squirt of carbonized water through the cranial midline where the bones only grow together some months after you're born. Fizzy lemonade or weak acetic acid, maybe, pumped in to freshen it up and get the electrons spinning again. Electricity, that's all it is, because they use the electro-thingummy to record the currents you give off by merely thinking. A small torch-battery would probably do it, wired up to the silent areas with a couple of counter-sunk electrodes growing out of the hair and you could press the button to give yourself a shot whenever you wanted it, like now with the sun on the nape of the neck and the thought gone soggy. A walk round the block or a cup of coffee or an orgasm do the job and you've seen boxers and footballers waggling their heads to get the same effect. Do it after a crack on the head to unsog it and get the current fizzling again.

You lift the head and the muscles go tight at the back of the burning nape and you unsog with a quick wiggle but all you get is a rattle of teeth because the jaw was loose and you forgot to clench.

Sudden the impulse and you're up and round and over and sitting on the slope with the sun in the eyes and you close them tight before you've had a chance to look at the sand below or the boulders or the leg. Just a quick flash of the bay before the sun

burns in and you judge you're more than halfway down and it's grassier here. No breeze now, the wall behind collects the warmth and stillth but no airshift.

Sitting with the hard of the round of the trousers into the grass and the slope you're on goes gentler lower; you know because it's a concave feel and the back of the knees won't touch the grass. Going to be easier from now on. Going to be a hayride down to the sand and the girl.

Orange eyelids warm like they were in the cliff-top grass-cup but you can see clear through to the spot in the field of vision where the boulder lies with the leg outprod. Clean through even without opening the eyes you can see because the point is fixed in your mind and during all the scrabble and trundle over the chalk you've known where it was even without looking and even when you were smelling the blue of the shadow and your back was turned. Constant in a fixed spot like a blob in the globe of the cranium that stayed gyroscopically poised whatever the outer structure was doing. They have it on tanks and battleships so that the gun remains entargeted no matter what.

Hands are raw on the grass but you get healing out of the green like gipsies have babies in hedges and you always find dock-leaves close to thistles. Specifics, that's called. Herbal remedies for chalk striations and frictioned knee-caps and skinned elbows and escaping headjuice. This preparation is grown on our own farms and is guaranteed to reduce discomfort in over-heated patellas. Every picture tells a story. But is it always spring-time under *your* arms? Just rub a little of the ointment into the carton-label and send it to the institute. You will receive a free and genuine reading without any obligation to purchase. Tomorrow may be too late. If she's dying now she'll be dead and rotten tomorrow, so take advantage of this amazing offer and start the landslide hayride. Nearly at the bottom now, and the sand is smooth once you get to it. You will be amazed by the results. Smooth and warm and you'll be able to take your shoes off and suck up the earth's magnetism that your spongy thought so badly needs.

Out of the eye's corner with the lids still down you can see the X-marked spot where you'll open up and there'll be the leg still sprawled that you've got to go down and see about but it'll be from a different angle now because of the distance you've come. See it again with a fresh eye and see maybe more of it because of having come halfway down.

Like not getting up in the morning you don't want to open up and you can feel the gum of the lids together when you incipiently drag at the muscles that hold the orange warmth in.

But you do and the image further down than you thought and there's more detail now in the drag of the stocking over the heel and everything's green again with the long time closed. Foreground cliff-foot straggles away to the sand and it might be some other bay from here. Grass that you didn't see from the top and the whole set-up is shallower, flatter, saucery. New bayscene now to the fresh eye and it's like a friend you haven't seen since he was ten years younger. Same friend with the old gestures and the old face but you've got to get used to the fresh eye. That's what it's like and you look closely again at the shore's familiar face.

Detail now in the stretch of sealeft seaweed, shells and pebbles entangled in the green and there are darker lines to the waterward side where the scum of the sea has dried at the inmost edge of the lapping swoosh of water receding. And corrugations in the sand where the undertow has rippled and scowed. Cowl of the hanging edge above sweeps lofty over behind the ears and curves to the distant rubble of rock. Not a curve, really, but it's the effect you get when a searchlight streaks over your head and you have to shift the angle of vision to get it all in and it looks curved even though light never curves apart from Einstein. Look up and you can only just see the fringing grass at the top and here and there a scrabble of tuft in the face of the wall where maybe some of it's dropped and taken root. Dropped because of the endless inward eating wind that's niggled and flivvered the chalk and undercut and concaved out the solid white. So much and so long that bits drop off the edge from having nothing to sit on.

Hangs poised the edge and if you look up long enough you'll get slices of sawed-off cliff in the eye. Never sit on the bloody edge again, now that you've seen the undercut.

Scree-trail into the wall leads down to the merciful grass and if you screw right round you can follow the track of the belly-slide right from the hairsbreadth rift above where you hung perspiring. Helluva way to come on the flat of the guts with the runnels and rivulets tearing by in a blear. If you'd been here watching the dangling feet you'd have been glad it was him, not you. You'd have stood well back and scrunched the eyes till the dead-weight avalanche finished and you'd have been silent as you stumbled up the incline up to the cruciform shape in the grass. Silent until you'd heard the breathing into the green, miraculous.

Practically the whole way down the bloody cliff in a land-chute belly-wise that you wouldn't have started if you'd seen it from here. Coward figure with its backside over the hanging brink and you can see the soles of his shoes as the feet feel about in the white and slowly the rest of the body comes over, mad as a hatter. Painfully clung to the smooth and the face looks over the shoulder at the empty air below but you can't shout up to the fool to go back because you're locked in past paralysis and you only get the inaudible grunt from under the sternum. Scrabbles and limpets, slips and sways and grabs at the sheer of cliff and shirtsleeves flap in the wind. Down to invisible foothold and then sickeningly drops. Your guts turn over and you gawp up out of the sunlit foothill but he's fast in the chalk and maybe he'll live for another few seconds.

First part of the drop in fitful pains and starts, but then the halfway ledge for the long-drawn dither. Beneath it the skid-white dirtwhite chalkride down to the hand that props in the grass and holds you haunched as you screw round to the fresh amazement. Didn't seem so long, the panic. Didn't think you'd come that far. Must be a hundred and something feet of slither and it went in at one electrode and out at the other. All over before you felt the raw of the shirtless belly.

Round to the front and shove in the shirt over the belly

without looking at the track of the cliff in the flesh because if you get interested in the damage you'll scare and you scare easy at bellyscoriation. Cover up quick like you saw the little girl coming down the hill in the crowded street one night on a scooter with her kid brother in front trusting and perilous and she caught your eye and smiled and swerved and spilled all over the high street night. Little boy hit his nose but she was alright and she staunched the blood from the trusting nose, covered the whimpering face with her woollen glove and glanced at you to see whether you'd seen it was her fault, just standing there covering the bleeding face without looking to see what the damage was. Just wanted to get it out of sight.

That's for the white-streaked blood on the belly.

Shirt down into the trousers and forward lean to socks pull up and then to the flap of the shirtsleeves under-rolled; roll up tight and inwards tidy over the elbow, arm extended, bicep slack and whiter where the sun doesn't get, and now the thin arm weak arm left arm tighter rolled because of the smaller girth.

Palms of the hands held up to show the whitesore streaking but there's less to see than it feels and all of the fingers are still there.

Wrists on the updrawn trousered knees with the hands dangling but the pressure awakes the rage of the frictioned kneecaps and you unship the wrists and flat the palms to the grass, lean back. Cool again the grass to the hands and you could sit like this for quite a bit if you didn't have a date with fright under the boulders.

There's a comb in the hip-pocket so you'd better straighten the hair because she might be alive.

Overhaunch and the comb's there alright; been there patiently waiting for usage all day with the self-effacing loyalty that you can hear in the tick of a watch on the wrist of a fornicator. There all the time, but non-existent till the hair needs sorting. Goes on being a comb with dogged persistence. Like posters in the underground that go on excitedly persuading in darkened corridors after the juice is cut off and the last clank

of charwomen's pails has echoed and died. Think of the inscriptions on coins that you never read in trousers pockets or over tobacconists' counters—all intoning seriously to each other

The maker's name on the cigarettes as you edged out over the grass and angled. See that the name is on each and every one. None genuine without this signature as you edge out over the grass.

Comb strikes into drying juice that you'd forgotten and you stop combing. She's almost certainly dead.

Comb back and the maker's names are still there so out; but they're crumpled flat like ancient egyptians when you get them out of the pack. Another delayer, the cigarette idea, and you slip them back in the dog-eared package, pocket them back with the comb as though you'd got another shilling in the meter of resolution and brush your hands together to prove it.

A hundred and fifty yards from here to the boulders, first the sharply sloping foot of the cliff and then it's clear sand all the way with no cover to lob under if she should wake and unsuspiciously take off her frock or start leaking womanly bottomly in the cliffward shade of the boulder and you couldn't shout at her in the middle of it to stop her or even cough to show that you've seen. You never know what women are going to start doing when they're all alone like you leaked yourself in the bush and adjusted your dress with the feet hanging over.

Keep at the back of the boulder as you walk over.

Up on the heels with the feet downpointed because of the tilt of the grass away but the body's upright and the head swims slightly because of the sudden change from stoop to stand but you don't give a damn while you're on solid ground. You could walk along a tightrope if it were only a foot from the ground; it's the brain effect that panics you when there's anywhere to fall. Like there was when you had to get back from the edge up there.

Chalk on the shoes comes off on the grass but only along the sides where the green laps over and you fix the eye on the stirless boulder and come down the slope easy without looking.

Slowly moving with the feet finding the right place in the peripheral vision over the cheeks. Eye to the boulder that lopes up and down with the jog of the walk and now you can smell the draggle of seaweed and the shells and pebbles and seathings. Too far from the top to smell and not yet in range from the grasspatch but now that you've entered the smellfield you get it loud and clear. Hadn't thought of the smell that must have been there all the time. Dissipated on the shift of air and thinned out fine like the thoughts of the dead so that by the time it got up to the *grassier artis* it was just fresh air as far as the nose was concerned. Particles of shorematter drifting around detached, powdered off and wandering. Same with the smell of cheese; it's really cheese floating about that you can't see and people too who smell are constantly powdering off and lacing the air. All the time diminishing as the stuff floats off wasting their substance in odorous living.

But the eyes don't leave the boulder however the nose is busy and the foothills finish and you're coming on to the sand. Could take your shoes off when you get to the sand. Always an urge for shoeless feet to the bare sand. Because of the want of the flow of the earth to the feet or maybe sexual like some people like to have their soles tickled and this is the same only you tickle your own.

Sand now and it would be good the touch of crystals into the naked flat. It's the same when you're out in the country and there's no one around and you always want to take your clothes off.

Left shoe thin shoe heel to the right shoe toe and it's off and the other one off with the thick right hand and the backside slumps in the edge of grass where it tails off into the sand. Socks have been there all the time, too, and you scow them off and there are ridges and stitches in rows where they've pressed to the white of the outstep under the shoe. Hardly dirty at all the feet but you rub with tips of the fingers where the toes divide in case she's alive.

Boulder bigger from here and the leg hasn't stirred.

It'll keep on getting bigger until you're right up behind it

and then you'll crane over at whatever there is attached to the leg and it'll hardly exist at all any more. Like inscriptions and makers' names.

Shoes tidy together with the tiny scrunch of crystals between them but they're outside in to each other and you switch them so that they look natural. Purely a matter of physiosthetics. No one will ever know. Socks each in its shoe although you couldn't be sure which foot was which. Scarcely worth worrying about.

Trousers turn up over the ankles and you can hear yourself breathing again as you stoop with the sun on the round of the back and the belly smarts as you straighten up because of the way the shirt drags out as you straighten. Drags out over the raw of the waistline midline and you push it softly back under the belt and start to walk.

Starting to walk in the last run-in to the deadleg with no possible excuse now for stringing it out. Clear run-in and you're moving over the face of the sand and the toes skim in to the crystal crust with the eye fixed all the time on the boulder and the shadow of it blue on the left where the waterpool lies and still the leg unchanging pointing out with a drag of stocking that twists and scrawns and goes with the leg behind the curve of the sun on the rounded rock. No need to go in fast. No need to go belting in with the toes dug into the floor and the heart going. Just nice and easy's all it needs. Soft and barefoot with only the flat of the soles going in. But no creeping or it'll look from the top if there's anyone looking as though you're stalking a five-ton boulder because they probably wouldn't notice the signalling leg like you didn't yourself. Peer down over the edge and wonder what the hell at somebody stealthing along in his bare feet. So a reasonable middling strolling pace but a glance over the shoulder up at the top and along in a quick sweep for the head popping up on the skyline

but nobody peeping.

You get the idea you're being followed or somebody's looking and you have to screw round at the magnet point between your shoulders, have to stop and listen at night in a dark street and listen for footsteps but it's the echo of your own you hear,

clicking and mocking along at the back of you only a click out of step.

That's how it is on the wide sand even without the clicks. You knew there was nobody and if you stop and look round again there'll be only one set of footprints because it's only you and it's hardly worth stopping

but you stop

and there's only one set of prints trailing back to the cliff like you knew there would be. One set and you can see how the urgency went out of them a while back when you took out the toepress. Sun streaks over the surface and the prints are dark in the damp yellow background. You could reconstruct the whole thing because it's quite clear where the toes stop as if they'd been switched off and the nearer ones are clean instead of skittering scraddles of sand all messy. The shoes are at the end of the trail, calmly waiting. And your feet are at this end, looking, but you've got to turn them round and get on with seeing about it. Again to the top the eye, but nobody. Only the after-image of seated blueshirt making up his mind he'd have to come down and see about it. Watching now to see what sort of a job you'll make of the boulder approach and wondering whether you'll really have the guts to look when you get there. And what you'll do when you find her drowned all privately under the boulder. Because he knows that she's dead, certain sure. He knows it and he can't understand why you still persuade the stubborn mind to figure out what you'll do if she gets up and has a leak. Got it all figured out translucently, sitting up there invisible but still wondering whether you'll have the guts.

You had the guts for getting down the cliff and he was surprised at that alright. Surprised as hell because when he looked down at your frightened face and saw you sweating and shaking with the fingers clamping over the top he thought you were going to call the whole thing off and haul up quietly back again.

Didn't think you'd make it after the tearing bellydrag, hardly expected to see you get up when the banging was over and only noticed the sea-stilt grandstand when it was whisping

away into nothing. Looked down at the figure inert and decided the venture wouldn't be worth it and looked so long that he didn't notice the seventy thousand. Decided he'd better stay where he was and discretion was the better part and he's still up there hunched with the legs over the side and mighty surprised at what cowards can do when they just leggo and it's either a drop or a gentle slide to the grasspatch. Harmless translucent Spectator up on the edge you can safely ignore and you hear the rough of the beard again on the blue as the head comes round from looking, but rougher this time because it's been busy with growing. Boulder looks suddenly nearer because you've been looking away, hundred yards now, maybe, and you didn't realize it was as near as that when you stopped to turn to the following watchers. Coming up slowly you only get the enlarging in jumps; stays the same size until you're intermittently aware of the diminishing stretch that's left to go and it suddenly looks bigger. Now after the backward look you get it sudden.

Hands in the pockets for casualness and you move forward again and if you veer a little round and out to the right as you go the leg will slowly uncover, so you widen the step outwards with the eye on the leg and it comes into sight a quarter of an inch at a time with the bayward movement of the barefoot tread. Just below the knee and there should be a skirt pretty soon because of the stocking and the image is larger and you widen the step good and wide and you get an inch or so more of the leg in view and you're up to the knee but no skirt yet. Maybe skirtless; but hardly. She wouldn't have taken off her skirt.

Sound of the rough of the trouser legs crossing and rubbing and you can hear your breathing again but that's because of the quiet. Ripple of shorewater plash and recession goes on in the background but it's been there so long that you get the sound of the trouser legs louder, like the ticking of a clock goes soft when somebody whispers.

No skirt.

Above the knee now and there should be a skirt.

Quite near now and you can see the taution of stocking over the flesh and the seam twists round beneath the back of the knee, twists round outwards and wrinkles. Heel in the sand and the calf at an angle upward so that you can see underneath and the seam comes round in a wiggle under the side of the knee.

If she had a man there she could have taken off her skirt.

You stop with the thought of the possible man. Possible man from the back of the rock adjusting his dress before leaving and coming to bash your head in, lightly darting over the sand to where you stand surprised with your head ready to bash in. Over the sand with outraged outrage red in his fresh-lust face and you'd turn and belt back to the shoes and socks with the yells behind and you'd gather them up in a running scoop and swerve off wild over the beach with them under your arm and probably drop one of them as you ran and turn in your running to see whether there was time to pick it up but you'd hear the pounding padder of bloodlust feet to the sand and you'd abandon the lot rather than clutter with bouncing one-shoe remnant. Scatter the lot as you ran and he'd be momentarily surprised at the bits flying about and he'd slacken the chase to see whether any more of you would drop off and that's when you'd belt up the last remainder and he'd be left slowing up with the drag of the lately loinlost energy petering off.

You've half turned with a defensive shoulder and the hands have gone splayed in the pockets and you relax now that you've got the plan of withdrawal straightened out. Stiffly relax, but you narrow the sideways gap as you move in, slew round to the left as you go and the toes have started curling over again of their own accord, curling and digging although the movement is slow. Back and around to the left behind the boulder and the prod of the leg diminishes step-by-steply.

Filling out the scan of the eye, so close the rock and you lighten the tread to the sand because of the enormous noise of the stealthing foot. Lighten and breathless sideways slide behind the mass; tongue comes out to tip the tip of the teeth and slides smooth over the inner dentry back to the alveolar ridge

where you normally do your lingua-dental plosives. No breath now for plosives, only the glottal stop that holds the heart in.

Hands have come out of the pockets and you notice the feminate upward lift of the little fingers, but no time now for recriminations because of the oncoming rock that's not so bloody smooth now that you see sunstreak over the ribbles and scoriations. Pitted and creviced and pocked with green in the crannies and the light glints out of a micropuddle that sits and gleams surprisingly wet after so much sun but it must be deep-set inset to have remained for so long.

Smell of the rock now as you suddenly find you're up on your toes and the jaw hangs silly.

Sound of the shifting toes in the sand comes back from the close of the boulder, like blind men know when they're walking into a wall from the echo that we can't normally hear or don't bother about but it comes back now in an airy chamber of resonance made in the undercurve of the rock to the sand. As though the rock were whispering back in the close conspiracy.

Foot concealed now that you've come round behind but you'll only have to lean forward, tips of the fingers to the boulder, and as the sight comes up over the contour you'll get the whole shock in one go. Forward now the stretching finger and the heart's going all over the place. Hear it up in the neck again and there are bounces of pulse in the outward arms.

No sound; only the glotted air that escapes and the pounding heart and the sigh of water idling down at the edge. No sound from behind where the woman lies. Tips of the fingers now to the rock and you're touching the rock, the boulder, touching the rock. Grit of sand that slips as you press and you get the noise of it and there's a crunch from the toe-pressed floor as the gravity centre shifts and the toes go in.

Listen again, toepoised, but no woman-noise, no scruffling man-love lust sound. No sigh or glunk of swallowed saliva. Only the background of fiddling lappling water out of earshot focus and the gathering roar of the silence coming up again. Swelling

sigh of the raging silence but she surely hears the heart-thumps pounding.

This is the point you've hoped against, this is the rounded nubble of boulder astraddle the line of seaweed. This is the distant downward point the eye kept coming back to in all the width of silence. This is the round of brown in the stretch of yellow. Unrecognizable and you haven't had time to re-orientate the set-up, haven't got used to the close-up nearness but you can be sure this is the one, this is the place. Directly across from the foot of the cliff with nowhere to go wrong. This is the place where the seagull sat and you flung out museum exhibits, but unfamiliar from close. Better from up there; better to have stayed.

From the other side of the boulder

a sound.

Sudden fluffle of movement and you bend at the knees and duck and you're folded tight and breathing into the limpid pool. Head racing and the hair in a creeping tingle and the breath comes scouring out so loud you can't hear anything else. Doubled up with fingers stiff to the floor and one hand's up to the wrist in the water but you leave it there because it's holding your balance and you'll make so much noise moving to a new position that you wouldn't hear because of the breathing but she'd hear.

Wait in the shadow for the mansteps round the flank of the rock and be ready to dart depending on which direction they come from.

Crouch and listen.

Ready with tendons tight from the coming footstep crunch.

Or the leakready woman round from the sunny side fingers crooked to the edge of the skirt for the long stoop and gurgle into the sand and you'll just have to hare off hell for leather while she's in the middle of it without looking back at her startled shame and tear off over the beach and never come back and they'll call you Ephraim.

Crouch and listen with the mouth shut tight to stifle the roaring breath in the ears but there's only the whiffling breeze

that curves to the shadowed rockside and distant the wavelet water, distant because of the coupla tons of rock between.

No footsound. But somebody moved behind the rock as you stood there gawping. Fluffling movement you heard distinctly coming up over the boulder curve before you ducked. Not a headnoise or a thoughtnoise or a snuffling nose noise but a genuine outside sound, physical, actual. Clearly heard.

Nobody comes.

Wiggle of animal on the wall of solid close to the eye but you can't turn to observe the tiny progression because of the need for alertion. Steadily not look at the upward crawl. One of the watery ones that plopple their inter-tidal pastimes under the rock with the hand-infested pool to cool in. Left hand weak hand cool hand and the fingers are sinking into the soft of the puddle bed. Gentle pull with the weight to the other and they're free of the ooze but you've churned it up and there's nothing firm for the fingers so wander the hand to the crusty face of the rock and there rest it. Cold the rock to fingertips compared with the way it was at the top, and sandless with a thin outer layer of resilient soft; kind of moss, probably, short fine weed like you see on the barnacled bottoms of boats. But no eye-shift.

Keep listening.

No barnacles on hers, though, when she bobs down and riddles. You could risk a momentary ungallant glance before you belted off over the sand. White and balloony, ridiculous, even if she were beautiful which you'd never know. Could probably recognize her in afterlife in an identity parade a posteriori even from the quickest flash. Bland rotundity deeply etched on the visual memory. You could swear an affidavit on a bottom in circumstances like this. Cost half a crown, but make a nice change for the lawyers.

Cold the rock to the tips because of the cool of the pool-wet hand. Illusion of coolth from the rock but really the other way round. Like warm water is hot to the freezing hand and if you cross the fingers and put them to the end of the nose you'd swear you had two noses which you know from experience is

unlikely. Illusory cold from the rock. But bound to be actually cooler because of the shadow in spite of the fingers' inexperience.

Fingers cross in the right-hand sand spot and you reorganize the centre of gravity and bring them round to the nose. Crossed fingers up to the nose to prove it in the shadow of the boulder, eyes still fixed in listening but the hand wavers with the fingers crossed and stops and changes its mind and goes back to the sand uncrossed. Try it some other time.

Maybe if you put the ear to the rock you'd pick up tremors of what goes on, catch the vibrations like red indians do to check on who's making for Dead Man's Belch with a posse of horseborne scalps. Sounds through the earth because of the molecules passing it on and without moving the eyes you near the head to the rock that must be only four inches away but you go further than four inches before the tingle of rockwaves leap the gap and you feel that it's only another three sixteenths before you get there. Loud the tickle of hairs in the ear-ole and the rock comes hard against you cold. Only the living shift of the listening ear comes out of the rock. No rumble of voices or the drag of a person rising. Rocks don't do that, anyway. No intermolecular space for jiggling and bouncing and passing it on.

Nothing comes round on the airskin over the surface, no bending waves like the whispering gallery inside out.

Obvious, when you think about it, about the absence of intermolecular jiggling. You'll have to undouble and look over the top. Have to get it over and see what has been hidden and get it over.

Slew round to the face of the bulk as you rise with the tendons unsmoothly working and both the hands are flat on the cold, hand over hand like a ladder and you can't wait any longer for the footsteps. Rising smooth the eyes as the body unclasps and now it's back at the top with the sun and the sea beyond. Still nothing of the girl or anyone, no leg, but that's because of the breadth of the boulder and you press to the chill of the shadow and toes lift you up another three inches for

getting the sight down over the rock and it's the leg again unmoving, just up to the knee and you get no further. See it from on top, this time, broad of the foot and pinch of the ankle and you can even see thin of the stocking over the toepeak where it's worn. Tight shoes. But no further than before, no more of the rest of the unmoved girl than you got from the top or from the beach approach. Have to climb up, clamber and slip on the boulder before you get any more because she's under a sort of shelf, it looks, that hangs out over and covers the rest of her.

No manfoot. No move.

Better go round on the sand and risk the full intrusion. Quietly round and say good morning if necessary. Can't keep on like this. Can't keep peeping afraid to breathe. Must know why she lies and the hours has lain so still. Must know. Gotter get round and know and see about it.

Round on the sand and frankly look.

Heels down and you release the rock and you turn and put your feet one after the other in the damp shade with the trouser legs rubbing fit to wake the dead. Quite quickly because you've decided; although there's an ugly tangle of probability writhing and muffled in the back of the head and you can feel the panic of the transparent watcher holding you back. Moving round close to the rock and a resistible force pushes back but you black out the nine-tenths that doesn't want to go with you and just keep moving. Sound of the sea clearer as you flank the mass that hides and you never thought you'd see this other side, like they say about the moon, but you keep the eye to the water now that you're nearly round because you don't want to take it in bit by bit, want to flick over suddenly to the secret girl and get it all in one. Never thought they'd see the other side but now that interplanetary thingummy's practically here —there are more shells and sea-stuff scattered and you avoid them in the tread and the water-sparkle's still at it foreshortened and you're nearly round and you'll turn and look in a second and nobody's said anything yet and the watersparkle sparkles like a million floating boblets bobbling and it'll be cosmic colonization next and you turn the head

and you see the girl.

Sprawled alone and there's a bloody bird sat solemn on the sprawl. Sat in the middle of the girl on the flat of the frock-taut belly and you get

prickle-waves over the back of the neck because of the bird. Horror-waves spread and you're locked in a fright, chillstruck at the new-seen doubled-up leg from under the ravelled frock, twists ungainly back and under without pain and the seagull sits. Ruffle of sunwhite feathers as it sits and waits the break of paralysis and that was the noise you heard from the other side and the paralysis breaks and you

push forward wide-armed into the horrible secret and you're frightened at the frightened gull outspreading and crying and lifting and you wave and shout at the rising death-gull. Shout with a tearing drag at the bottom-most cup of the lungs and the thorax tingles and reverberates and the blood gets going again in the head and you get the ferocity coming back from the cliff, doppling and doppeltganging along and about the channels and chines of distant chalk. Wave and strike the wheeling wing, flail and claw and lungs with the hoarse voice voicing. Strike it out of the air but too smooth and quick and it's free and sailing and looking. Proprietorial calm from the gull and you go on shouting to break the influence; bellyshouts deep and gusty into the breeze. Breaks the spell of the longpent secret, tears into the disaster under the boulders, sets the blood off again and slacks the attention tension. Slacks and relieves the taut of sinew, answers the clang of fear in the back of the head that might louden and spread and engulf if you didn't surprise it with echoes. Deep and long and good the shatter of sound. Ears ring with bloodstir and you've made a pattern of fright in the smooth in front of the boulder with the raggle of feet in the sand.

Look down with the sing in the ears and you see the maze of panic you've made with barefoot shouting. And the eye to the figure rises and you can see the toepoint leg that's been there all the time, up past the knee and up to the top of the twisted stocking where the frock's high-ravelled and that's unfair to the

sleeping woman and you go quietly in with knees adither and the arms gone limp, go calmly in and lean over, hand to the boulder and flick down the covering fabric so that no stocking-top's visible; flick it down with the lightest impersonal respect so that your fingers scarcely touch the private thigh. But in the hollows of the folded dress it's darker, wet where the sun hasn't dried and you can see stripes of dark and light in the green of the dress where you've spread it over the leg, smooth over the curve so that the sun can dry it. Still with the hand to the boulder leaning and the lips coming away from the teeth because of the hang of the head you look up to the head that you've got to look at sooner or later. And the heart is going like hell. Up past the tight of the waist and over the greenprint breasts to the neck that's white and long and trusting and head's backtilt and sideways in the shadow under the ledge, so that you have to widen the pupils forcibly before you can get the detail in the dark with the heart going like hell. Widen them forcibly because of the glare on the sand and the body and the uncaring flatflung arm. Narrow the eyes and you get the milky face foreshortened, averted, dreaming into the shadow with the underflesh of the jaw drawn tight and white and the curve of the lips that follow the curve but further back and then the nostrils you could see right up if you looked and then the dreaming lids and arch of the brow and hairline. Blonde the hair that cradles the head but you can't properly see because of so far back and shaded and her head must be hard up under the rocken shelf, in the wedging space between the sand and rockroof.

Sleeping.

Look for the hand to wake with jiggling gently but it's under the flank of hip, tight under because you can see that the forearm goes under and from the lie of it the hand must be under the small of the back.

The heart's going and you've come down from the top of the cliff and you're going to wake her because you thought she'd been there too long lying. You can get sunstroke sleeping like that even when the head's in the cool of the rock. Thought

she might get sunstroke so thought she ought to be wakened. Just happened to notice from up there and thought it best to come down in case she got sunstroke. Not at all, quite easy to get down, no trouble at all.

Withdraw from the leaning dithering hand and round the pointing leg to the other side and you stoop and can see the upward looking shape of breasts from here but you go down to the hand and it's elegant on the sand with the second and third fingers close, pointing finger separated from the middle two and the little one away and slightly curving, greekly. Light dusting of dried crystals randomed over the fingers and as the eye goes to the wrist there's a scurry of beetle away as though it had just lobbed off the flesh but you couldn't be sure. Brown hand big hand fingers slip beneath and the white hand little hand female one is light as you lift, slowly lift without disturbing her and you get crystals under the nails from the gentle dig in the surface to get underneath.

Light and warm and you look at the twinwide nostrils back in the shade and the full of the lips for the change there'll be when the thumb rests and presses and wakingly strokes the back of the sleeping hand.

But if she wakes with her head under there she'll probably move and bang her head, scrape on the rock she doesn't know is so low; better she should come out and forward so that the face is free to wake up conveniently. Better out a foot or two. So back to the sand the hand and round to the footpoint and you can undouble the crooked fold of awkward leg and you get the hand to the knee and raise it so that the foreleg can come out nice and tidy with the other one, both pointing in the same direction, and you have to push up the knee further than you thought to free the awkwardness and there's a flash of knickernub as the skirt comes up but you mustn't look and you get the eye firm on the round of the knee and keep it there while you pull out the ankle that comes and scrapes a curve as it comes and there's a dig of sand on the outcome foot and the knee goes back into place as you straighten the leg and put it neatly next to the other one and there they are all tidy and they match

perfectly except for the one on the right being worn at the toe of the stocking and the one that's come out from under is a bit whiter than the one that's been there all the time. Even under the stocking you can see the difference and you pull down the edge of the dress again. Match up alright in a moment or two when the circulation gets down there and the wearing away of the stocking has been darned but it's working through again because she's probably heavier on the left foot than the right or maybe the right's a fraction bigger like the right arm big arm and left arm small arm, only a fraction and nobody but the proprietor would know. Shoes both the same size but more rub in the left than the right because of the fractional difference in footsize and the colour will never match and the circulation won't get down because she's absolutely

dead.

Fingers firm on the unticklish soft of the stockinged insteps and this is a dead woman whose feet are in your hands. Prickles break out all over your body. Look up along the girl, back to the nostrils there in the shadow and all along it's a dead woman that you've never known. First time ever the feet of a woman dead in the hands. Inert uncaring vacant. Never had this before.

No possible move, no waking, no afterwards. Still the after-warmth of life, but been sustained with sunglow, fed from the outside worldwarm shine of the bay.

Somehow easier and calmer than you expected. But never had this before. Never the unilateral intimate touch of the stockinged soles, never the dear dead toes with darning over the thin that nobody saw when the shoes were on and the feet quick. Only she was aware of the number of threads she'd put beneath her shoe. In some small room alone, urgently for the importance of whatever was going to happen next. Squeeze the feet gently; hold them with the thumbs in the undersoft of the line of toe-hinge, fingers over the tarsal tendons and squeeze gently for no nameable reason.

Not so frightening now, not like the first explosion in the back of the head up there on the edge when the rambling eye was stopped in its sunlit tracks and the brain knew instantly.

Before all the reasonable argument and pros and cons the mind had made up its mind and withdrawn and left you to go on figuring out and supposing. Knew from the very first flash she was dead and knew you'd go down and see about it. Knew you'd be here with the warm of the dead in the fingers and you'd get used to the idea.

Not so bad when you've broken the first barrier of realization; when suddenly you've known it all the time. For her too, not such a fright now that you've been lying here all day getting used to it.

With your immovable foot sticking out looking for someone passing and yelling to the vacant landscape for seeing about it before the stillwarm lifehaze chills and gets used to it. Here at last the man who heard and presses chalky fingers into the stockings but it'll wash out and he wouldn't realize even if it wouldn't. Be doing something about it when he's quite got used to it but you can't rush him.

Stood by and watched when the country copper straddled the body and watched the gleam of the sweat on the bald as he moved in the rhythm and didn't notice the details of palms to chest (or was it back?) and how many sways per minute. Didn't notice because it wouldn't ever be you doing it. More likely be you with the green spilling out of the mouth and this was what it was like. You with the head to the asphalt and the back hard down (or the chest, is it?) and no jacket for the head to the hard. It wasn't the back, that's it; it was the chest with the face down and they made sure his tongue wasn't blocking the air and opened his mouth and laid down the hands beside him. But you've seen pictures of them doing it on the chest—on the lower thorax pressing and something under the head and the man who's doing the pressing always has armbands to hold up the sleeves of his shirt and a stiff white collar and a moustache. You can do it both ways probably, but wouldn't be right to squash the breasts, the gentle breasts beneath her. Surely not. Be good to have a man with armbands here on the beach or a copper born and bred on the way the breasts go.

Somewhere concealed in the female shape the latent fading

stir you could scurrivate into beginning again; re-kindle. Simulate the old habit in the lungs. Make them think they're doing it themselves and slowly reduce the intervention without their knowing they're taking the whole of the strain and if you stop imperceptibly and steal away they'll take up and sustain the rhythm with the old authority, almost forget there was ever a break and go ahead cockily, independent.

Rehabilitation, like putting one paralysed foot in front of the other, picking them up with the hand laborious and smiling sweetly up at him from under the starchy white and you can see the iron legs of the beds all reflected in the polish of the floor but the ward'll have to be done again tomorrow with all this galloping about and the foot shows willing and forward it goes nine inches and you plunk it firm for him and tell him to throw the weight. Go on doing it for eighty three months and he'll eventually walk straight out of the dump and you'll never see him again in your life.

Do it with lungs, too, and you straighten up from holding the feet but the floor of the ward's got seashells scattered and the smile's on the face of the green-print patient.

Part of the job's encouragement, purely psychological, so that she'll know it's going to be alright so there's got to be an air of success about the way you go about it; optimistic and efficient so that she gets confidence and inwardly smiles. They go on clanging the firebell long after they really need when they come whining up to the place where you're hanging on by your fingernails. For the same reason—you can read it in the handbook of fire-fighting—so that you'll know they've arrived and you've only gotter hang on another few minutes now and they've got it all taped.

So shirt off and business-like for purposes of morale and you unbutton down the front because it's not the sort you have to pull over the head and when the buttons are free you drag the tails out over the top of the trousers and arms slip out and it hangs ridiculous down at the back because of the backside tail-tuck so you haul it out and throw the whole thing on to the sand behind you without looking because if you turned and

looked where it dropped she'd think you were more attached to the shirt than to her and that would militate against the success of the treatment. Small points like that have to be considered. Temptation to look at the bundle of fallen shirt resisted but the eyes go covertly down for a quick flash at the scratches still raw.

You take in the visual impression but hold up conclusions for another time. Just register the white and the red striations and file it for reference.

No shirt now and the chest expansion is perhaps unspectacular but certainly not to be sneezed at and anyway it looks bigger to her from down there. Shirt off and feet in the sand each side of the waist and the first thing is to pull her out from under the shadow, no need to look at the face too long, and you can slip the fingers under the back of the hips and raise her middle and slide her out. Fingers under and there's sand in the nails again as you dig and the full of the hips is colder damper and you take the strain and she's heavier than you'd think but the middle comes up and there's a scow of drag from the floor beneath as she drags. First sound from the girl and you grunt a bit as it scows so that it doesn't sound too loud; eye to the waistline not looking at the face with a trail of hair behind but a quick flick up and the head's moved out of the upward tilt and is looking square up at the sky if it weren't for the covering lids. Waistline again and you've left the arm behind in the downward drag, the arm that's crooked under and you let the right hip gently down and hold her sideways up while you claw at the underarm and you get it in the full of the forearm and the hand moves out in a sandcurve; moves out faster than you pull because of the magnification of movement down to the fingers, three or four inches at the elbow but a big sweep of the hand at the end. Out into the open and you let her down on to the hip.

Smile would reassure her and you try one as you back out of the straddle but you can feel how false it looks and you scrap it. Ridiculous.

Shoulders have hunched because of the outward pull and

the hair's out behind in a straggle and the arms are away from the sides and the dress has gone up again over the knees and she looks very young with her narrow shoulders hunched and her arms out innocent and the feet falling apart. They make a right-angle with each other and you pull down the green again that's beginning to gather sand inside where you keep hauling it down and you re-settle the feet so that the heels are separate and the soles are parallel because the right-angle effect looks silly. But they want to keep falling apart and you have to hold them together. She's trying to help but she can't hold them together and it's not her fault. But it's alright, you can get a coupla smallish rocks and put them each side. Away from the deathbed and you walk down into the blare of the sparkle to find the rocks. Rough but as smooth as possible on the inward sides so that they'll not scratch the feet. Light-haze out of the water pains the eyes in the sudden look and there are black shapes scattered about near the water, black because of the glare behind and when you get up to them some of them are tangles of seaweed but there are pebbles and rocklets too and they wander in out of the downward look as you move. None big enough though, to prop. Shells and worm-casts and ribbles of damper sand and you get the chill of the sea through the soles although you're a coupla yards away from the water. Water sucked in and abandoned by the tide as it went, lurks under the drier crust and only comes out when you squelch it up with footprints. But none big enough the rocks.

You could do it with sand, though.

Could do it by building sand each side of the flopping feet and holding them in place like sort of bookends.

Flat of sandfield sweeps in a curve as you turn; shells and things distinct in the centre of the rotation but smeared at the outer edges because of the centrifugal effect. Smeared streaks peripherally but the whole thing settles down again when you stop the turn and pick up the outward footprints. Downward eyes are caught again in a sandlocked pleasure like they were with the lights on the water. Kind of spell that comes up now and again and you want to just go on watching.

But now the footprints back at the shouting scuffle and the right-angled feet come in and you snap out of the pleasure and hands down to the sand each side and you scoop and drag and pat it to shape and the feet still want to fall out sideways but you gouge out more and pile it, bank it tight and comfortable and when you've finished there's a little hill running down from the row of toes each side and the feet don't fall apart any more and she feels better for the upright feet.

Purely a physiosthetic matter.

Straddle again and you look at the white of the neck and you don't stop the eyes at the neck and you let the face come in.

Her face. And the heart starts again.

Dreaming look and sympathy chinks at the corners of the mouth and she's lying patiently inwardly smiling waiting for you to bend and pull the arms so that the hunch of the shoulders spreads and you do. Closer the face as you bend and you keep the eye on the face as you spread the arms and she's gotter lovely face. Streams out the hair in regular straggles and it's lighter in tone than the sand, all honeyfair but it goes darker where it's wet and falls away from the breadth of the forehead in a powdery down all fine and fair and dry.

Lies sort of gleaming to herself and she's gotter lovely face.

Down into her face and you expect any minute the smile will broaden and the head will twist away because of being looked at.

Just goes on gleaming.

But you snatch out of the looking and you gotter get busy on the lungs gotter kneel respectfully with the knees astride the waist and you go down kneebent respectfully and you get the shadow of your head centrally cupped in the valley between her breasts. Ears lug out at the sides and spread to the dressflat nipples and the shadow glides over the girl without touching, she doesn't feel it there on the breasts. Glides faithfully over the contours as you move your head and she doesn't feel it and the earshadows curve to the breast-high crests.

Hands to the thorax, thumbs tipping, and although the green looks dry there's a micro-squelch of moisture and the

knees get firm astride and you're ready for the rhythming pressing into the rounded thorax, thumbs in line with the fall of the line of the ribs where they finish and fingers firm to the sides.

Practise a bit first. Don't want to squash her to death.

Start gently.

Forward on to the hands and the weight shifts forward into the arms and down with the forward press and into the girl you push and there's a

gurgle up at the mouth.

Ugly horrible gurgitation out of the dreaming mouth

and shock comes over you everywhere and the ears go back and a wave of fright and the hands come up in fright and you're up on your feet in a fright all over at the shock of the sound from the mouth. Backward away from the fright and you stand with the guts turned over and arms gone viscous willowy and you weren't expecting the watery voice; not used to gurgling mouth in the lovely face.

Hands to the back of the neck to stop the point where fright wells out and spreads. Fingers lock in a neck clasp over the fear and you feel the sun on the fingers and close the eyes and long breathe in to get back to before the gurgle.

Water inside her.

Threading her insides right up to her mouth. That's what it is, she's got water all over her under the print of the dress, under the breasts, logging and clogging and gulping the life out of her. Bronchial tubes and pharynx and gullet and stuff all watered and bunged.

Didn't think of that. Must let out the water immediately, get her free of the glug. Soon as possible. If it were just in the lower half of the body you could get it out through the usual hole at the bottom but this is water in the self-contained upper compartment that won't go through to the regular waterworks.

Must do it quick. Tip her upside down and empty her out.

Empty her out on the sand quick and let the air in so you go in again from the point of retreat and get hold of the legs and the bookends scatter and you drag. Out quickly from the

rock, heels dug in behind as you pull and her arms splay out sideways as you pull and the hair trails and the bloody skirt goes up again and you're hauling a dead woman around on the beach in the sunshine but it'll be alright when you swing her out and round and down the beach and then back with her feet to the rock so that the tilt of the shore'll make the water run down and out of her waterlogged tubes and round you come and the speed gathers because it's easier once you've got going and the bloody frock is up again with the dragging and the legs go beautiful back to the knickers that you just can't help seeing and you apologize and you look round for the rock and it's coming up just behind and the noise of the scouring drag of the girl reduces as you slow to a stop and you let down the feet gently where her head used to be. Gently down and then quick to her side and pull down the front of the skirt. Roll her over on to her front and the water'll be able to come out. Still at the sky the covered eyes but you hurry to get the hands under the shoulder and hip, stretch across and pull and over she comes and let her come gently because of the crush of the breast to the sand. Keep the mouth out of the sand with a finger under the forehead and you fold up the opposite arm so that she's resting the head on the forearm and down to the mouth to look and already the water's coming. Finger into the lips and then the little one between the teeth but it doesn't make the water come any quicker. Sand gone dark under the mouth where water's been coming and she'll be alright in a minute when the water trickles out.

Better if you tilt her more, more than the beach does. On to the feet again with no fright now and stride the figure with the sand-brown drag of dress up over the back and you pull it away from the shoulders and shake it to get the sand out. It'll be alright when it dries thoroughly and flick it down over the bottom and grab her again at the hips and you hoist her up from the middle and you can hear more water coming into the little puddle under her poor mouth. Like a child piddling, you're holding her, like they do into the gutter with the mother waiting for the feathery noise to stop.

Trickle feathers mudly quietly into the sand and there seems to be no more to come and you give her another coupla inches hoist for the last drop but the arms are beginning to tremble from holding and you gotter let her go any second now. But you hang on a bit for the last drop until there's only enough energy left for putting her down without bumping. Softly down and there must be a good lot of water out. She knows you ought to have done it right at the start instead of worrying and fiddling with the feet. Sooner it's out the better and it doesn't matter the water having been in there so long because sometimes they get them right from under the sea and do the resuspiration. Knows you ought to have emptied her out but no touch of criticism in the posture as she placidly lies. Uncomplaining and now thankfully emptied with the bare feet on each side and the sun on your hair as you look down.

Wait for the last trickle out from the back of the pharynx before you turn her over and get on with the suspiration. And the sun is warm on her sand-dragged hair and though you're hardly aware of it like the grass growing and the beard coming up, it turns gradually lighter as it dries. Imperceptibly lighter so that if you look away and look again it'll have changed so that you can see but go on looking and you don't notice.

There's a tinge of red in the drying hair that you'll have to see about after the suspiration. Fleck of red, but get back the breathing first. The vital breathing first.

Last trickle out while the hair was getting lighter and fold at the knees and down astride and you can roll her again between your knees and pull with both hands at the shoulder to bring her round to the skyward gaze, pull firm but gentle but she won't come and you stand from the kneel and the feet go neatly into the kneeprints and she's got five buttons doing up the dress at the back of the neck. Five that you didn't notice but not like the buttons you get on a shirt. Blobs of something wrapped in the green material and instead of going into buttonholes they've got loops of thread round them, thread lashed on to the other side of the gap and the gap's only about two and a half inches long. Five buttons for a fiddling gap like that so

that they're nidgled and jostled together all touching and must be hell in a hurry. Funny they take the trouble. And the gap's not long enough to widen the neck that much when it's undone and going over the head so why the trouble of buttons, conceit of buttons where even for unthought sexual purposes even for maninvitation they're useless. And fiddly.

Fiddly and dragged in the wet sand and there's a sort of shadow of sand on the lower circumference of each one where it's dug when you dragged. Feet in the rounded kneepads and hand to the shoulder again and the other one to the waist to help and she comes over smooth but you have to move the foot as she comes over on to it and the buttons go over into the sand again.

Face up and the lips are scarcely parted and a shine of new-touched water over the jawline spreads. Dry away in moment like the lightening hair but the buttons still dig in the seventh occipital vertebra and you slip the hand under and shift them so that she's comfortable. Fingertip shift that pushes them out of the midline, easy.

Must take up at least a quarter of an hour's unnecessary manufacturing time.

Shine of the water gone and there's no black wiggly tideline like on the sand where the sea went out. Never know it had been there if you hadn't seen it. Composed again with the authoritative air they have when they've just been to the lavatory and indignity is forgotten the second it's over. Cats the same. Fall out of a window and start washing themselves hurriedly unconcerned in case you knew of the indignity.

No trace of the water.

So knees again and hands to the pressure but you get the arms symmetrical first and a touch of sand on the cheek you flick off before you start, flick with the softest tangentouch and some grains go on to the lid and you lean and blow but the lid stays nerveless and there's no sand now on the lid. Lovely the lids and full and she would never have made the gurgle if she had been able to warn you. Didn't mean to belch the fleshlocked water, couldn't help it. Couldn't purse the lips and hold it in

against your pressing, couldn't help the surge of watergurge. Horror like yours as she lay and waited for you to tip her out.

Now dry inside and ready for the

push

as you lean on the hands and the mouth is quiet as the hands go down and you don't even look to the face as you forward swing because you know there'll be no gurgle and relief comes over the tingling scalp because of the silent lips. And the weight stands down and you hold it a second or so like the lungs would do if they were doing it; count one, two, with the downheld hands and you've got to get the air rhythm right like the pond-side copper did, slowly back on the heels and the toes dig in and one, two, as you rest on the indug points and again to the forward downward movement, steady and firm the swing with no eye for anything else than the concave clavicle cup that's got a little sand in still and the weight is

down

and you go one, two, with the girl going in with the ribs compressed and staying like that till you back release but smoothly, surely and that's the rhythm you want and you'll carry it on with the eye to the grains of sand and the movement automatic so that when you've had a little practice you'll be able to do it without concentrating or knowing you're doing like you get when you've been driving a car, one, two, and your mind's been all over the place but it's been going on for so long that you behave like a machine and yet you're wide awake and in case of emergency you do the right thing and then think afterwards and the number of grains of sand could be counted because there aren't all that

many

and stay down for the statutory airsbreadth; plenty of time to count them but the movement of the head makes counting unreliable as well as profitless but it passes the time like when you're driving and you get registration numbers to collect or the number of objects you pass beginning with m or having a bet with yourself on how many pubs there'll be between here and the end. And talking to yourself or singing or just muzzing

off in a think, one, two, but you'd probably never sing while you're having a session at this like you wouldn't smoke in an art gallery, although there's no real reason if you smoke quietly so as not to clash in on the longhaired wavelength and bring out the warden from his monotonous seat in the doorway and tap you on the artistic shoulder and say quietly oy and you stub it out on the sole of your

shoe

and lob it into the grille that they have round the seats where the heat's supposed to come up and you walk away and go on looking at your reflection in the glass of the pictures and you get people walking and standing behind you and pointing hushed at tonal values and planes and aerial perspective but you're looking at them in the reflection and you can overhear what they say and look straight at them which you can't normally do when you're tuning in on somebody else's conversation. Helps to make out what they're saying when you see them. Gestures and head movement and such that clarify phrases you wouldn't have understood unless you'd seen them saying them. Kind of lip-reading that brings the chuchichication of whispering sharp into focus. You can always understand speech better when you watch it, it's one of the things of phonetics. But the bloody cigarette wasn't out properly and there's billows of smoke coming out of the floor where you threw it and the place is a bloody light and the gallereligious silence busts in a vulgar skirmish of hectical bellowing and you're

glad

to have launched the carumpus and you stand and watch and you lean against the marble at the door marked exit as somebody breaks the glass to pull the lever but it's painted in oils and the hand goes through the canvas and gets jammed in the hole it makes in the plywood and there's another spot of trouble for the firemen because he can't get it out and the place is full of smoke and you can hear the bells coming into Trafalgar Square against the one-way traffic but they're allowed to do that unofficially and the marble's beginning to blister because it's actually only hardboard with a convincing marblized

finish that they got somebody over from Italy specially to do and you hang on to the moulding seven feet up like it says in the handbook, dust under fingernails where they never bother because it's above eye-level, and they come in surprisingly by the door marked exit just by your shoulder and you see the hatchets busting through although the door is actually unlocked all the time. One of the firemen is detailed off to go round to the back of the plywood with one of the sledgehamming bashers and clout the hand that's poking out into Trafalgar Square so as to free the longhaired panicker and he aims beautifully as the police hold on to the crowd and give him air and somebody steps forward with his jacket folded into a cushion and he holds it over the knuckles as the hammer comes down and it doesn't hurt a bit because you can see him from inside suddenly looking at his hand released surprised and sort of cheated and he wanders off into the smoke flicking his fingers and looking at them like people do when they think they ought to have hurt them. Fingernails are beginning to bend over and the legs are dangling over nothing because the floor's collapsed in a whoosh of heat to the basement and it's a case of letting go or else so you do and the wall flies by as you drop and you get the heat of it as you go and you come to rest on your

belly

on the steps outside and everyone's silently watching with the police holding them back waiting to see what you'll do next and wondering whether it's time to applaud and all you can hear is the feathering puddling fountains and pigeon-flights circling over. Somebody picks you up and he's taken off his helmet and he's gotter coupla rocks that are smooth on the inside for the wobbling feet and he walks over with you, breaking a way through the crowds and picking his way gingerly between the shells and chips of shorestuff. Right beside you with a ridge in his brow where the helmet normally goes and his big yellow toes dig into the sand as he swings in time with the rhythm and grunts for you as you go down to the

breath—

hold and comes neatly into the synchronous backward lean

and glances at you to see how you're taking it but he doesn't say anything and the eyes are firm on the midline spot where you'd insert the blade for an emergency tracheotomy if it would do any good but in any case the copper's knife wouldn't have blades sharp enough because the skin's surprisingly tough when it comes to medical students and the other thing's for horses' hooves and he's doppeltganging back in your heelward curve and the grains are still uncounted. Huddled in the secret of their untold number, the grains, each a party to the mystery of totality. The number is known as pie are squared was known but secret until whoever it was gave it mental expression and thought he'd discovered it. If you count them and it comes to three hundred and six it'll be three hundred and six but it'll have been that all the time, even without your counting. Fixed and determinate so that if seven of the grains are blown away the subtraction will be checked off in the silent comptometers in heaven's mathematics division. Clicking over all the time, everything kept rigidly up to date so that at any given moment you can check anything you like against mathematics; any chance relationship, any number of grains in any number of clavicular crannies. Not only the subtraction from the

total

within the cranny but the addition to the beach that the subtraction implies; the clickers hold up while the airwaft sand-grains wander and the numbers pop up as each one lands. All worked out and you can look up the files if you want to. Like a geometrical figure that enlaces the universe suspended in the immensities, shifting and weaving with the ceaseless rearranging of measured relationships; but always the overall pattern, symmetrical, spherical, hairsbreadth poised. They have models like that in museums to show molecular arrangement and crystal formations made of threads interlaced in a transparent container and you hold them up to the light and see the secret world of tenuous order hermetically sealed and it's lovely like those glass ones you pick up and there's a snowstorm round the lighthouse and you want to get inside. That's what it is with a woman when you see the bland of her belly that's poised in the

cradling cup of the pelvic suspension and it lies there ignorant of its own secret and smiles at you from over the intimate entrance. That's why you want to get in. And you can put the ear to the warm of the smiling flesh and listen to the world within and you get the same feeling as when you held up the glass to the light in the museum on a hot afternoon and you saw the orderly tangle wherein some answer lay. But one of the facets of glass came away as you held it and you were ashamed of having done it because it wasn't private any more and you wouldn't have known what to do even if you had been able to get inside and you put it down on the bench where they wouldn't notice that you'd mishandled it. Not until after you'd

gone

they wouldn't have noticed and you have to keep this up for much longer than this like they do in the newspapers for sometimes hours on end without even stopping to see whether it's having any effect or hoping. Just keep on in the rhythm and not think what you're doing or listening for the sound of breathing because it's the same as a watched pot never boils and it's only a few minutes up to now. But the hinge of the toes going under's beginning to hurt and the sand is sharp to the bend of the knee. You can shift the kneeplace without stopping, wriggle them out of the hurt as you sway and the new position is only a trifling shift but it's better and now the toes unfold with the knuckles flat to the sand and you're down a fraction but it doesn't affect the swing of the rhythm. Mustn't stop now and listen for the breathing. Mustn't be tempted to stop. On with the rhythm because you'd only be disappointed if you stopped and she was still as dead as when you started; take the edge off the resolution, it would, discourage you

both

to have the sudden stop and the pilot light inside her not flickering into flame. The arms are tired and they dither each time you go down but she can't feel it so take no account of the failing arms and let the knees and the toes go numb because nothing must interfere with the life-infusion but you'd never think it was so tiring and you let the stiff of the back go slack

and it sags in relief between the shoulders and the skyhigh backside. Wasting energy on an unnecessarily straight back. All the time the spine taut and no need. Try it with the arms, too, so that when you're at the

bottom

of the swing you bend them slightly and take off some of the hard of the push, kind of shock-absorption. No need to stiff the arms, no need for tension anywhere. Just nice and easy like the copper would. Strain in the arms spreads over the picture, calls out for relief; relax the muscles but still there the ache, clamouring. Shouting fainites in the struggle but the eyes go up to the face from the midline pinpoint and the eyes are on the face that slips and slides beneath as you move and you gotter be deaf to the screaming arms like she is deaf because the lights are out on the beach and nobody hears the noise of the

arms

in the draughty bucketless corridors. Yelling only to themselves, the arms with the last echoes of buckets and spades dispersed and the juice turned off at the elbows. Slips and slides and the shadow caresses, comes up each time to the smooth of the brow and

halts

and wavers and backward moves with the swing of the heedless head that had forgotten it was casting a shadow but went on faithfully doing it according to the rules. Slackly over the face, untouching; wavering shadow-skim over the contour, over the thin of the nose and the fulsome pallium sharply across the part of the lips and into the valley beneath the lip and down in a swoop to the curve of the round of the chin and quickly under the undercut jaw to the midline sandpoint, down to the neck of the greenprint front and stops and wavers and moves again in a gathering sweep smoothly over the crest of the chin, under the underlip dip and across the full of the smiling mouth and darts to the tip of the nose and flanks down the sides as it upward streaks and lifts and rounds for the shape of the lids and slows and pauses over the brows and sits and

waits

as you go one two and comes again when the head comes back and the noise of the breathing's covered by the sound of yours that sounds in the ears and only reluctantly fits the tempo of suspiration. Reluctantly sticks to the rhythmiration but would like to go galloping off on its own because of the exertion of fro and to and downward press, wants to slip into its own-spiration because of the puffing and froing and pushing. But you gotter keep it the same all the way,

can't

speed up to fit the gasping need that bounds in the chest. Gotter keep to the standard scansion whatever goes on in the busting chest and see that she gets it cool and steady and confident, couraging; unflagging and copperlike. Metronome placidly tocks in the back of the head regardless and that's what you gotter follow. Been at it since you started only you can hear it more now. Hear it not with the ears because of the roaring breathing but you get it with the midline inside auricle that you use for the universe. Hear it and stick to the measure of forward swing and

press

and the shadow comes up to the statutory point and relaxes but you're grunting now with the effort each time. Not as fresh as the metronome and you want to stop but you go on as though you didn't know your own reluctance and she looks up thankful as the shadow glides down. If you stopped the shadow at any given point and drew a line round its edge and then shifted the shadow a quarter of an inch and then drew another one and went on doing it all over the face you'd have a contour chart in three dimensions, perfect enough to reconstruct her from. Make it every thirtytwoth of an

inch

and you'd get real accuracy, so that you could withdraw the head from within and leave the lines standing but the knees are gritting again and you'll have to scurry in the sand for fresh bedding; shuffle them sideways and you do it by spreading the splay of the thighs and it's better but not so better as it was the first time. You'd have to be careful with the lines, once you'd

withdrawn the head, because of fragility. Have to be handled like cobwebs and put in an airtight box and stowed away from

boilers

and use no hooks and be careful that you don't unlatch one of the facets or the threadwork'll surge out like a grunt in a downward press and she's thankfully looking and trusting you'll not give up in spite of the pain in the back and the pressure of hands to thorax but it's not in the least harmful and if only he'll carry on we may get somewhere because you're trying terribly hard and he's been so sweet about everything even if he was a bit slow in starting. Ribs'll be black and blue after this and there'll be some repairs to the face with the sun and the salt and the sand and being dragged around with the hair in the beach but he seems not to notice the make-up situation like he tried not to notice the knickers which was gallantry in the extreme. If you hear a crack you'll know the ribs have gone with the pressure and the sun goes over his head as he comes in again and down on the

ribs

but they stand the strain and you look up through the darkened lids at his big face in the shadow and he's got a sort of a puzzled expression and there's that grunt again that he didn't do to start with at all, but it's been getting louder and the sun comes up again and the lids go orange as he swings back and the face gets smaller against the sky and you're simply bursting to get the volition back so that he'll be able to stop and say how are you but the inside's still a bit clammy from saltwater. Shadow again and he's on his way back and maybe this next one'll set you all off again. Frightful the gurgling belch when he started. Frightful the way it came out all vulgar with him meaning so well and summoning up his courage and all that, but you really couldn't help it and down he comes with the puzzled expression and

grunts

and stays for a moment or two with his breathing close and there's sweat on his forehead and you can see his tongue doing nothing all limp in the open mouth and quite a lot of fillings

in his teeth you can see. About thirty-one, perhaps, with all those fillings, but you wouldn't ordinarily see them and the sun again and he's back on his heels and although it's a matter of life and death and you should be scared you get quite calmly out of the body and see the thing from yards away, not frightened at all as you look back at the accident under the rocks with the spine of the man, the knobbly spine, showing up where the skin draws tight as he leans and the shape of his squashed cigarettes and the comb in the tautened pocket. And the sparkling sea behind them. Rest of the girl comes out from under the straddle of trousers, quite indecent; but they're close together which they wouldn't if it were really and they flop apart absurdly.

But you get back quick to the empty form with the sandy grit in the back of the hair and you're here again watching him through the orange glow. Be silly to be out when he calls. Risky to wander off when any time now he might be getting the fagocytes started. Back home to the fagocytes under the grunting rhythm and the come and go of the orange glow. And the fillings and sweat. Everything patiently waiting for the twitch of a toe, for the flickerevivification. Standing around, not intently, but with the unbearable weight of covert sympathy. Tide elaborately casual and drumming its fingers in the classical waiting trill on the edge of the beach. Cliffs and boulder and sky all waiting like people do when you're trying to crank a car and all of their hearts are straining with you for the first ignition and you wish they'd bloody well go away and leave you to gasp and skin your knuckles in private and get the thing spluttering without the added burden of their straining hearts.

Boulder silently straining its molecular heart behind you. No visible signs in the boulder but the crunch of the underside into the sand goes on, immensely pressing. No movement, but the strain is there with the irresistible downward crunch of the rock in the immovable sand. Tensions unresolved in fiercely suspended animation, a state of pregnant neutrality where the upward and downward forces mutually cancel but go on exerting, meeting in a secret paroxysm of molecular grunting.

Walking unthinking in the museum one day and you came round a corner and were horrified with the bright red mask that stood on a glass shelf in a glass case but bursting with the last limits of pent-up breath. Bulging with air from within that the frightful lips refused to emit, eyes popping and veins congested, red with the ferocious struggle of the strength of the lips and the strength of the lungs. Locked for ever in the extremity of insupportable strain. Awful.

Went round to the back of the case to unpersuade yourself, to see the back of the bursting face and from there it was only the back of a mask, quite calm. Relieved to find no tension there at the back, feasted on the calm at the back of the mask and then came round again to look at the plosive inheld bulge that went on whether you watched or not, always at the point of blood-vessel bursting. Came suddenly over frightened and shoved off away from the glass case and tried to conmingle with other exhibits, unurgent. Tried but you knew the potential burst remained englassed behind you, no chance of relief.

Scuttled off out of the place, guardians unconcerned at the turnstiles, and went down the steps with the bursting thing for all time clutched in its horrible labial spasm. But diminishing behind you in the cool of the Cromwell Road, smaller and smaller the point of unease and you got on a bus and went home.

Same unease that you get in cathedrals and power stations and sometimes cinemas. Stand by the girth of the rearing column and get for yourself the endless strain of the crush of the roof. Not just static the columns, but active stone that crushes the floor that repels the ceaseless downward thrust. Action without movement, petrified stress; there's no peace in stillness. There's a fear you get that comes from feeling the physical forces of structures; you get possessed with the tension of their interaction, locked in harmony with their motionless strains. Like the terror that comes from a wound-up spring that never unwinds.

Bend an iron bar and the tension you give it remains in the bend forever, a permanent shriek of constraint that nobody hears.

But the integration of all matter is tension, bent or not. Man, tree, boulder, cliff, all imbued with the inherent power of integration, the binding force that holds us to some central nub.

Boulder sits behind. A vast potential of distintegration sits mute and still with tension. Strain must be unbearable. But been sitting there unbearably with its pent-up bursting since God first charged the rambling universe with the look on the face of the mask.

Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.

This is the thermo-nuclear supradimensional self-generative divinity that keeps us together, body and soul. This is the all-penetrative interlacing God-ness among us. The supreme tension that frightens us, not with ordinary fear, but with unbearable realization, the vast dynamic understood.

Tension that links us with our testicles, ourselves with interstellar space, yesterday with forever, orange-peel with the Appleton layer, the mouse-trap with Buchenwald.

The bee with the swarm.

One thought with the next.

Here and now.

That seems to dispose of tension. But there are other things you gotter consider, like frinstance relief. Which is the very opposite.

Maybe God is relief (like the sigh she's going to sigh when she comes round and which the sky and the sea and the cliff and the boulder are all waiting for and have long since imagined and are now just being patient about). Like a sigh. Or the relief you get when you think they must have been run over and then they come walking up the path all smiles; that's more godly. Or when you stop banging your head against the wall. Or when the seed-pod bursts or the telephone finally rings or you have a good long steaming leak in the dark of a country lane with the stars for beautiful company. That's relief and that's God too.

Contradiction has crep in.

But maybe it's the tension and the relief together, the plus

and the minus, the yes and the no, the whole incredible thing that's God. The mere being of everything and of all possible permutations of possibilities. That's what it is. The irreplaceable immediacy of actuality, the miraculous istigkeit.

Boulder sits miraculously being.

Istigkeit is one of those like weltanschauung and gestalt that could quite easily be translated if you had the time but it's safer to let them go at that. Make them up as you go along; zusammenausgeschichtigkeit, for example, and gemeldungsabströmpfausbarweise.

May even mean something.

Strč prsk krsk krk. I perform an emergency tracheotomy.

Liluška stood there with the central european wind in her hair and you knew you were seeing her for the last time. Notice boards in the marshalling yards behind her that had once been painted in Cyrillic but now were overpainted with black and then Roman characters over that. Long before when it was Moravia they had painted the characters in Cyrillic and they who had painted them were long since dead and unaware. Couldn't see the wind in her hair for what was going to be the last time, didn't know the miraculous actuality of the young and whispering hair as she looked up at the high carriage window and told you that the ways were very křižované. The ways are very crossing, she said. She wore cornflowers pinned to her front and she looked up confident and said that the ways of life are twined and mingled, that you would meet again. Křižované. Or was it křižovaní? Depends on the gender of the ways, but for years after you had remembered křižované with an é, remembered the marvellous actuality of the palatal occlusion, the immediacy of the ř, the ž with the thing on top and the long-drawn -ované. There on the country station with the steam dragged over the marshalling yard in the flying air and her face turned up to you and the honest mouth saying beautifully křižované, and after that there was a burst of steam from somewhere under the train and it blew back behind her like a white backcloth. She stood out clear against the white, detached from the gaunt of the railway station and her lips

went on saying something but the noise of the steam took it away. And your hands met as you stretched from the height of the Moravian carriage and you both smiled and looked long and last and she was drifting back slowly with the ruthless movement and the fingertips unclasped and she drifted smaller with her hand still raised where it had been and you got an overwhelming lump in the throat and when she was only a dot among the greys of the sheds and gantries she still stood but the lump in the throat welled into the eyes. You couldn't see her any more.

And didn't ever again.

Since then the siren and the terror and the years and shame, all uninvented when the wind caught the whisps of her hair and the moment was sweeter than you knew for that. Savour the irreplaceable moment. This one, coming up now, will never come again.

No sign of movement yet, nor hint. No irreplaceable movement.

Among the greys of gantries a dot diminishing but the tracks are křižované, multi-webbed; some led to Dachau, some Siberia; some to lovely unknown places. Better she remains for ever with the cornflowers and the brief sweetness looking up at you out of retrospect with the wild steam behind her.

Kříž, cross, cruz, kreuz, croix, crux, the same; crossing and weaving and interlacing and křižované, transcontinentally networked; but you had to change at Vlissingen and you never saw her again.

Lump in the throat.

Tension in the throat.

God in the throat.

God be in her throat as she looks unlooking up and the shadow slips over the lips and tips the crests of the breasts and slows and stops and sweeps up and over the milky face that looks unlooking. Shadow sweep that she couldn't feel if she could feel, that strokes but doesn't touch. God be in its stroke that doesn't touch, God be in your hand and in your understanding. God be in your strength that's kept on going, in your guts, your power, tension, glory and grunt.

Suddenly he came over all subjunctive, your honour. I was making my way in an easterly direction along the shore when I became aware of a subjunctive figure kneeling in the sand. It was the prisoner. I asked him if he was praying and he said he sort of was. But I noticed the body of a woman lying between his legs. It was not clear what was going on but I noticed a lot of footmarks immediately adjacent to the scene of the episode which suggested there had been a struggle. The footmarks was very confused and mixed and when I pointed this out to him he said it was the result of him having scared away a seabird that had been sitting on the deceased and also of his having switched the deceased round from the position in which he first found her. There was also footmarks of his leading away from the scene of the episode all over the place but coming back to it. These he explained by saying that he had been looking for a stone to prop her feet together with. I further observed, your honour, that the hair at the back of the lady's head was tinged with red.

Quickly round to the length of the sand but no policeman.

And down again to the deceased and the moving shadow that moves now without effort because the process has become hypnambulous. Been forth and backing and swaying and grunting and pressing and seeing the grains of sand in the neck-white cup without being wholly present; living in the immediacy of some other moment. Been in Moravia, haunting.

Back now the pain in the arms and the greenprint dress and the holy face looking up at you honestly with the sand behind her and the lips are saying something to you but there is no sound from them and no movement so there's nothing to hear and your head is filled with the sigh of escaping steam so loud that there is nothing to do but to cling to her tight before she slides finally away, cling and embrace with the tired body sweet upon her. Elbows out and the dear head cups in your hands and you are snuffling into the fleshly chalk of the neck. Close into the

neck the nose and you get the tingle of pain released everywhere in the body.

God's good relief and you are warming her with your warmth, tingling her with your tingle.

Pressed into the soft of her.

Thankfully close and you breathe in peace as the mind goes singing on and somehow you've come home after everything

Back into the cactus garden under the broken shadow of the vine and beyond the well there's a kind of an arbour where you can sit and look out over the sea and watch the boat coming in from Barcelona. Sudden pierce of siren over the water and the hand jerks with the shock and white birds flutter but it's only the pierce of the siren and no one need be afraid.

Didn't tell her about the upturned inward eyes but came and sat in the arbour over the harbour, both sat lizardly and heard the mufflification lazing back from the coves and Cas' Catalá and Ibiza.

All in the heavy sunshine, it was.

With her turning to look into your eyes and staying there looking without staring but softly looking and you looking back, both of you looking and mingling and softly delighted. No words from you both and the sun streaking down the curve of the sunbrown cheek and the dark lips just parted and the downward tilt of the head with the whites of the eyes pale blue. Such sadness. Speech from the living lips and you got a wave of God all over you; shivers of Spanish in the spine and your guts turned over to the tune of the Moorish murmur laced with latin. Came through the lazy air to you laced with latin, ancient and immediate in the miracle sun. Beauty speaks beauty and you are bowed with riches and you take her close and sit together under the leaves for a long time and she says things softly in the rounded arabesque murmuring tongue. Head close and you see the mouth's deliciousness, lips' nobility and the very speech issuing.

No more lovely thing than the speech's issuance touched with the living mouth; comes vibrant, not knowing how it

comes nor even wondering. Spilling into the instant air unwondering like some microscopic pyrotechnic spectacle with endless superimposition. Eye close to the moving mouth and observe intently. Close to the living God and watch the gentle birth of lagrima and milagro, each separate sound a gesture of the mouth, opening, offering, softening, fashioning the liquid flow of voice and you get the feeling of intrusion that you get when you look in a microscope and see the unending change and change again of secret cells busy with their own divinity. Pleasing feeling with the eye steady on the lips and the voice coming warmly, each momentary pattern of articulation perfect in itself and smoothly overlaid with new perfection. And the other half of the observation laps in tides of significance as the built-up pattern of sound brings images into the listening back of the sunwarm head. Mounting tides that pound the heart and soon spill into the tear-duct; milagrimas fill the eyes.

Same as when the flat of the hand is up to the lips and the thumb to the Spanish throat. Fingers lightly touched to the ridge of the nose and she speaks to the tactile hand, touches the holied hand with spanudiction and the sanctification spreads in tendrils into the arm and across the shoulder blades.

Her lips are full and good. In the harmony of their meeting, in their composure they speak even in silence of woman's knowledge, of the God of women and the God of Arabs.

That's why you kiss them, snuffle into the neck's divinity, want to be enveloped, pleasantly to intrude.

And you do.

Ignorant of your compulsion but she answers mutely from the fearful unthought store of knowledge, from the God of women; smoothes your nuzzling neckward head with the hand of knowing, presses you to her, closes her eyes. Lips but slightly parted.

Chalkwhite neck blue-shadowed by the nuzzling mouth.

Into the face of the female cliff the nose intrudes and the breathing sounds. Snuffles and warmly breathes so that you get the warmth coming back at you like you get echoes from the Heavyside layer and cathedral roofs. Or in bed in the morning

with an edge of the sheet at your nose and you've built up a little cavity of warmth there during the night and the warm of the breath suffuses the nose and the cheeks and the eyes and you don't shift an inch or you'd damage the intimate echoing warmth. Into the white the long breath and it wafts back friendly.

Into the female neck the nose intrudes and the breathing sounds.

Tired all over the body and everywhere a tingle of sanctification; spreads and warms over the nape of the neck and flows echoing back to warm the dead deceased.

Shock of the dear deceased beneath and you take your intruding self away and the cheek's left cold

urgently away

up from the dead woman

and the mind unclouds

and the sea and the sparkle reel lopsided as the eyes come up and the head swims with the new upstanding. Swims and reels and the shore comes swivelling round and you gotter get away from the awful thing you've been doing down there. Back the legs uncertain and swims the head and the hands come up to the shameful face. More back and she lies receding and you take away the sight of the scene with hands to the face. Still with the chill on the cheek and the chest and the thighs where the new air strikes, where you have lain and touched and were warm.

With a dead woman.

Mazed off in the swing and fro of the suscitation and dropped from tiredness. Dropped forgivably from tiredness. To her forgiving breast and thigh from tiredness.

Away from the awful thing you've been doing down there but you

(bloody well knew)

knew all along for certain sure you'd never revive her. Knew as the sand and the shore and the sea there knew, knew she was a dead woman.

Poor dead woman on the beach.

All pretending to wait for the sigh that you and the beach

and the boulder heard her make before she made. Sigh she never sighed. All playing in a big conspiracy because you knew.

Like sometimes you come on something and you say what's this? in your mind even though you already know what it is. Ask yourself fool questions pretending you don't know the answer when all the time it's written all over her honest face with the lips but slightly parted.

But you didn't know. Riven with double-awareness because you didn't really know. Knew and declined to know. That's what it was, like not accepting defeat. Refused to submit to her deadness. Partly because of the ordinary fear of death and partly because cases have been known where people have come back after unbelievably long times and partly because she was alone on a lonely beach

but mostly

because you were horrified with death. That's what it was mostly; but now not so much. Not really so much now.

Looked at her now and touched and lain without any fear at all. Intimately into the throat the nose, with the cheek to the curve of the clavicle and she's sweet and dead.

Footprints back to you from the sweet deceased, fresh in the mesh of sand where the earlier trampling softens now with the dusted breeze-born film of crystals and sand between the toes and clung to the trouser knees and all about on the rough of the stuff of the clothes there's sand that you flip and flick with the loose of the fingers and it comes off easy. Powders into the breeze but leaves a trace of dampdark that'll dry in the warm.

Neck crane back, crane back for the sun and the eyes chink and the jaw hangs as the head goes back for the vast of singing sky, but the sun's coming down the other side now. Only the fringe of the dazzle when the hinge of the neck's fullstended. Break if it went any further or fall over backwards so round with the feet finding their own place in the sand; up again and straight into the roaring glare. Flickers with the shuttering eyelids and there are huge great images floating and knotted as the

eyes go down. On everything, superimposed, to prove that you saw it. No longer the sparkle but the image floating, suspended angrily over the sea as the sight moves round and it comes inshore with the shift of the eye to the dear deceased. Lost in the blinding centre. But still she lies and you shift and the glare comes round wherever you look and you close for a bit but it's stronger in the dark of the lids. No warm of orange now because of the upward sunsweep back behind you and you open again and the glare's diminishing and she lies and waits for you.

Knew all the time not only that she was dead but knew too at the back of the muzz you had stopped and were snuffled into the dead neck.

Knew quite well but paid no heed for deeply you had wanted her sanctification and were ashamed and overlaid the wanting with random retrospect that mused and confused the censor and you were forgivably tired and nobody noticed when you merged her into the Spanish neck and flopped on her forgivably.

Warm over the shoulder-nape with the summer sky backing away to the cliff and the shadow before you; pointing back to her the shadow and the shirt lies huddled, self-consulting, forgotten where it fell from the great gesture.

Arms across the chest as you stand with the last remnant of image fading and she's coming up perfectly clear. Beyond her the water's edge and the wiggle of seaweed, but now the edge is nearer; some of the swooshes come wavering in much further. Gentle.

Stand with the shame and self-forgiveness mingled, stand and know that you knew she was dead and know that you knew that you'd mingle the tingles of sanctification.

And get on with the respiration.

Get on with the unavailing efforts to revive no matter how sweet and long the shame. Have to keep on like the pond-side copsweats, untouched by human subjunction. Just when the will flags and doubt spreads, that's when you need the new compulsion and start all over again fresh. If you'll only keep on for that extra bit regardless.

Stretched the shadow because of the lowering sun and it

tips the legs of the girl as you move with the warm of the sand to the feet and you are going back to her to carry on. Angled across the body as you come up close and she lies and trusts you as sure as she did when she dragged you down from the safe of the perilous seat that calls like hell for you to go back up there. To inhabit the after-image that sits and watches. To unwind it all to the point where you first noticed.

And not to notice.

Back up there.

And you want to call out to the shirtless one that moves unwillingly over the sand with the rumple of blue flung down in the scattered footprints and the tangle of tendrils invisibly linking the man and the girl and the rock and the shirt and the sea beyond. To stop him. Wrench him out of the terrible context and bellow out bellyful yelling but not even a grunt comes out of the mouth because of the total paralysis. Harder you urge to the pent-up larynx the tighter it gets and you're left with the vacant jaw hung wide. Nothing doing in the vacant mouth that dries in the rush of thermal up to the lips, and you watch and the mind yells out to stop him. And the bloody bird comes sidling, same bird again comes sidling into the episode and waverly hovers and spindles and watches. But he doesn't see the bird. Except perhaps for a fleet of shadow that skims the sand and he only registers this with the frontal lobe so it doesn't count and he goes on moving in on the girl and the mind screams out tremendous and he stops

and looks round

up over your shoulder to the line of the cliff and the calling spot on the edge but empty. Smell of the heat of the sun on the fleshly shoulder and the cliffs look blacker now with the fall of the sun to cliffward side and the sky's frying in the fringe of the brilliance. Blackened by contrast but we know from personal experience that they are really white and it's only that the day moves on and charges the immoveable structure with new colours and shadow-masses and springs on you a sudden new architecture and you gotter get used to the arrangement.

You get used to it for a few more seconds while you avoid

deciding what you're going to do next. Intently back at the greying cliff getting used to it but you're fooling yourself while you look.

(Suddenly clear that you aren't going to do any more respiration.)

Quite clear but you haven't told yourself yet, so you don't officially know. Clarity happened at some un-nameable point in the sweet disgust and it's waiting now to be let in after you've finished getting used to the dwindle of light on the phalanx of cliff. Savour the sight of the light and the moment's suspension. Give yourself a good long linger. Because it'll all be different when you come round again to face her; you'll have made up your mind that there isn't going to be any more respiration and it'll all be different. And somehow lovely.

Vision of cliff goes shimmery watery and the lids come gratefully down to the touch of tears.

Only for a moment though. When the eyes come open you're adult again and able to stand the strain of the sudden relief that'll come when you turn to her decided. Eyes now to the cliff unseeing, still fixed and you snatch the gaze and the turn of torso out of the grip of the cliff-spread grey-haze; suddenly alive the feet to the sand and you're moving over the flat of the beach towards her. Quite clear and sharp the new decision now that you've let yourself in on the matter. Hangs in the brain as a multidimensional flourish of light, exactly symmetrical. Lovely. No one would think it had only just happened.

No more respiration. She is aware and she shares your relief. She lies sweetly dead across your vision and understands and is much relieved and is very beautiful against the sand.

Your shadow across her, middle to middle. She is beautiful against the sand with upward palms and slightly parted lips.

The sun stays still behind you and there is no hurry for anything but the sharp immediacy of being. Patient, now the sound of the swoosh of the sea, quiet the breeze. Only the flurry of footprints to contradict the calm; they lie scattered like a handful of muffled cries thrown down, now just moaning softly to themselves. Their sound is comforting; they cry themselves to sleep.

Once more the gentle grit of beach to knees as you go down beside her, where you belong. Left hand stretch to touch the hair and right hand out to the toes. Her length encompassed in your span, your head bends down to the greenprint dress and suddenly she is something like an altar. This is the great relief, coming up now. She is glad for the end of the respiration. She is glad for the great relief contained in the outstretched span and the forehead touch and the sound of the patient sea. Beautiful under the touch of the forehead and the outspread spanudiction.

Somewhere down in the heart of the belly the lovely feeling; stirs and swells inside like a cat that has long lain snoozing. Stirs and turns and stretches itself in the warm of the part between your guts and your lungs and pads about on the soft of the gut and arches its back against the lungs and sets off a great malaise that you hope'll never stop. This is the lovely fear that you got when the lips looked up from under the laurel leaves, that you got in the Spanish garden; the lovely fearful firstlove fear that spreads in a warming quickening glow to the beat of the heart and the measure of breath and the moist of the tongue.

Swells from a central crux that you carry about with you all the time unnoticed—a pinhead seed of soul that lurks a lifetime under unsuspected gall-stones. Flowers and burgeons, filling the interstices of liver and kidneys with tendrils of God.

That you get when the man and the bull are mixed in a bloodsmeared moment, breathless. That you get to the whistle of falling bombs and the touch of lights on children's faces and through a microscope with snow-flake crystals and with the sudden thought of knickers.

Now steals up inside you as the forehead rests and the quickened sound of breath comes back from the greenprint. Invests and inhabits you, mounts the trachea and spreads out across the clavicles to where the shoulders ache and wait for the great relief. Ripples over the shoulders and meets at the sunbrown backbone. Now to the nape of the neck and the prickling

hair-roots and downward under the seat of the pants to the loins.

Full circuit now as the loins join up with the guts and the stirring flows unending up through the lungs and round to the shoulders, down to the backside up through the frontside. And offshoots up from the clash in the mid of the back, sweeps through the tingle of scalp and spends itself in a wild display that rocks the calm of the resting forehead.

Rich malaise.

That you get when you go past the dustbins and up past the door of the concierge and the winding stairs are of polished wood and there are two front doors on each floor and you keep on going until it's the floor that matters and it's the one on the left and you ring and do some breathing a bit after the five storeys. Shortly the sound of heels on the parquet and the heart's firing on all cylinders, partly because of the stairs, but mostly because of the fine malaise—and the door is opened. Lovely.

Downstairs in the hallway the dustbins and outside the lights and the trees and the fresh night air of the Boulevard St. Michel, but up here under the crazy roofs it's quiet and the parquet creaks as you go in and you touch hands, clean and warm.

Tinker about in the kitchen with coffee cups. They make noises just like coffee cups when they clink and it's intoxicating. Kitchen drawers lined with Le Figaro and when you turn the water heater on it says gently *boum*.

You get it when you're walking in Oxford Street with the sparkle of shoplights shining from wet of pavement and you put your hand in the pocket of the coat you haven't worn for six months and you find unused metro tickets. Get it in a big wave then, with the clic-clic-clac of one-way subway gates in your ears as you stand in the London streetlight. A big wave.

Like a cat padding round on the warm of the gut.

Stirs in the male womb, a thought.

Strikes out from the nape of the brain into the windy night and darts unerring, sharp through the ragged corridors

of sky, into the warm of her room on the cinquième. And suddenly the dustbins are happily down there again in the hallway and the parquet creaks under your feet and the coffee cups clink and you open the kitchen drawer just to make sure Le Figaro's still there. And it is; and life is one helluva lovely cat-padding pain in the chest because of the way Le Figaro's still there.

Praise thee, almighty and most wonderful God for the way Le Figaro lies in the clean drawer, there, under the gleam of egg-whisks and things. Lies mutely observing the limitation of its dimensions, potentials and qualities; praises God in its calm obedience; inhabits precisely its length and breadth and depth, not a molecule out of place. Fits exactly the vacuum there'd be if you whipped it suddenly away. Amazing how well it fits. Like all matter does, even intricate things like cobwebs and chandeliers; whip them away suddenly and there'd be a beautiful invisible vacancy threading the air, perfect in every detail, all carefully thought out. Praise thee, God of dimensions for the lovely way everything fits into the space it occupies.

Godly, the ripple you get from that. Sort of lovely and frightening. The whole body goes up in an uncontrollable Hallelujah Chorus, touches madness in the dome of the universe, spreads and thins and clings to the bosom of infinity, dying from sheer life.

Like you get with a woman. In delicious extremis and you want to enter with the whole body, want to clamber back into the female entrail where God resides, to touch madness in the dome of the womb, to die of knowledge in the secret warmth, nestling and curling and padding about inside where you came from. Till you are suffocated with safety and loveliness.

And she would have you enter, have you destroy her with your rending entrance. Wants to contain you back where you belong, to have you settle and curl; agonizing within. To have you fit exactly, not a molecule out of place. Both of you sweetly dying. That's what she wants, a woman.

Dying from sheer life.

With your head upon her belly she smiles but doesn't know why. An infinite smile, a Hallelujah Chorus in some modest bed. God is somewhere hereabout.

That's what it is with women. It's God.

You're born reluctant, awakened from an immensity of dreams. And there's always a sharp nostalgia that hints at immension, at something or other you gotter get back and you keep looking for it in churches and paintings and bullfights and telephone calls and the Science Museum and daffodils and under the skirts of women.

And in the Hallelujah Chorus with the roof of the Albert Hall slowly becoming airborne as hysteria mounts. Gently lifts with the surge of voice like a lid from a kettle of boiling praise; each new upward thrust sustains it in the nightsky spinning. (The spinning is due to some little-understood phenomenon connected with the magnetism of the earth. Like bath-water twisting as it goes down. Occurs frequently in nature. But there's doubt about why it goes down anti-clockwise north of the equator and clockwise in Tierra del Fuego. Bullets do it too, although this may be intentional.) Anyway, here is the lid of the Albert Hall conforming with the well-known natural law and rising higher in shallow steps as it spins, rotating so slowly that no one in the auditorium notices. Held on the last upward roar while a new wave gathers force to send it higher. From inside the effect is tremendous but you are the only one to have glanced up and you are embarrassed at being alone in your knowledge of the state of the roof. There is a gap of at least ten feet now between the edge of the circling disc and the lip of the building. You can see stars through the gap as though it were an observatory and any minute there'll be an immense telescope rising through the floor, scattering the seating accommodation and the cash customers. But of course it doesn't because that would be fantastic and you look down away from the gap and carry on as though nothing had happened. Crescendo follows crescendo and you are torn between being swept away with the violence of it all and observing minutely the patter of plaster and masonry chippings now

falling lightly about the arena. There is obviously some danger of the disc breaking up in mid-air. Still nobody notices. The only hope is that the lid will drop accurately back in its place at the end. You observe gratefully that there is a circular hole in the centre of the disc (presumably for ventilation in more normal circumstances) and this will have the effect of allowing the disc to descend vertically instead of side-slipping on the cushion of air. The principle is well-known and is applied to parachutes. There is therefore no cause for alarm. Revert to a study of the patter of chips. This is far less severe than it was, although it's remarkable how nobody else has noticed it. Your duty is obviously to stay calmly to the end. To rise in your seat and point warningly to the floating roof would undoubtedly cause a panic, particularly as the sustaining volume of voice would be thrown out of control and the roof deprived of any chance of an accurate descent.

You stay calmly to the end.

There is a terrible risk of intervening silence as the singing stops, but there's scarcely an appreciable pause between the dying of the note and the outbreak of applause. The applause is wonderfully loud. You clap and sweat, hunching your shoulders against the crash of the lid. The applause diminishes gently. During the minutes that it lasts you dare not look up. It peters slowly out. There is silence. You look up.

The roof is neatly back in place.

Of course, it's a thing you could never tell anyone.

Beautiful under the touch of the forehead and the hands outstretched.

Or you could build a great structure for singing the Hallelujah Chorus in. A special vast structure only for the Hallelujah Chorus. Kind of a church, really, just for that. With a special arrangement of the Hallelujah Chorus that went on and on perpetually.

There'd be a central platform for the main singers and the platform would be endlessly rising. About seven and a half miles an hour would be the speed. Rising continuously in a narrow shaft of organ pipes and perpendicular architecture.

With little balconies and galleries among the organ pipes in which you'd put more singers and as the platform rises their voices would come in, layer upon layer of superimposed voices in the echoing vault and the whole structure would shake and rumble with the reverberations of the voices and the organ pipes. Always with the central voices rising through the shaft serenely upwards. The central platform would be the helluva structural problem because there'd have to be no cable visible hauling the thing up and no hydraulic telescopic thingummy pushing it from underneath. The whole illusion would be lost if you could see what made the platform rise. Couldn't have runners at the side, either, because of all the projecting bits of organ pipes and little balconies. You'd have to control the upward movement from outside the shaft by means of very large magnets all equally balanced so that the platform were freely suspended in mid-air and you'd move the magnets up and the platform would glide up lovely at seven and a half miles an hour.

Have to be a helluva tall shaft.

How about an immense circular shaft? So big that you wouldn't notice the curvature at any given point. An immense thing like a big wheel at a fair. Like a big bicycle tyre. Then you could fix the magnets outside and move the *shaft*. Clever, this. Fix the magnets and the platform inside would remain stationary—although freely suspended—and the movement of the circular shaft would give the illusion of the platform moving upward. Much easier. And really perpetual because you wouldn't have to keep on letting the platform down to the bottom of the shaft again and fiddling about with reverse gears and such.

And inside it would be lovely with the sense of upward movement on the platform and the main voices singing away like hell and the subsidiary voices coming from right above and getting nearer and mingling and overlapping and fading as you went up past them and organ pipes rumbling past on the way down. There would be illumination only in the immediate area of the platform so that you get the effect of voices echoing

out of the darkness above and coming into the blare of brightness as they got nearer.

The thing presents organizational and staff difficulties.

For example there would have to be some means of conducting the whole thing. Getting the people in the little balconies and galleries to come in at the right time as they sailed round in the circular shaft. Because the circle would be so large that when they were at the furthest point away from the fixed platform they'd lose touch with what was going on. And the placing of the little galleries and balconies would have to be arranged with tremendous care and in close collaboration with the bloke who arranged the music because they'd have to come round just at the right moment. Like the pins on the barrel of a musical box. Probably a good idea to get someone over from Switzerland to handle this side of it. Takes years of experience. Maybe it could be worked out with slide rules and electronic computers. If you did it yourself it would be trial and error and take a helluva time.

And there'd have to be a fairly complicated gimbling system so that the singers in the balconies and things didn't get tipped upside down when they went right round the circle. Balanced in little gimble-units that remained upright and fitted neatly into the architecture and stuff whenever the units passed the platform.

Have to be very big, the circle. Quarter of a mile across at the least. Otherwise the curvature would be too noticeable. And at seven and a half miles an hour this would give the singing staff reasonable recreation time while they were not in the immediate vicinity of the platform. Could even be arranged on an officially organized basis so as to maintain morale. You could have canteen facilities, lavatories and things built in and slot machines for sanitary towels. Properly organized, the singers would have a very soft time of it. And of course there would be a shift system (exit platforms adjacent to the rotating wheel so that people could nip on and off without stopping the works) and you'd get hundred-per-cent perpetuity.

Except for the singers on the central platform. They'd be a

problem. You couldn't expect them to go on and on indefinitely without changes of underwear and such. Have to devise some means of getting them on and off the platform.

Some way of working a shift system like the rotating singers. Otherwise you'd get trade union troubles and resolutions being passed and angry notes being slipped into the hands of the rotating singers for the purpose of stirring up labour disputes. Shoved into their hands as they passed the central platform on the way round.

Beautiful the tired hands to toe and forehead.

Could be done by having the platform very thick, ten feet deep or so, like a large concealed room. With the singers crowded on top singing like hell in their singing robes and it would be possible to rig a trap-door in the floor of the platform through which one singer at a time would disappear without anybody noticing. Inside the boxlike platform there'd be a kind of an ejector-seat that you get in and when the circular shaft comes round to a certain point there's a photo-electric gadget that fires off the seat and you get shot through the side of the box, through the intervening space between the box and the side of the shaft and into a compartment in the rotating shaft. Timing would be the chief factor here. It'd be essential that you were not fired bang into an organ pipe or a bunch of rotating singers. If the ejector seat didn't fire at exactly the right moment there would be some very nasty accidents so you'd have to go into this very carefully indeed using dummies during the experimental stage.

Beach and the scatter of sea-things stand about and are lovely.

You could fix television cameras at various points concealed on the central platform and round the inside of the shaft and you could sit in the control room near the hub of the great wheel surrounded by buttons and screens and produce the whole thing as a permanent programme of worship.

Beautiful.

Wonderful shot from above as the platform appears to rise in the golden echoing shaft with the voices ringing and

swelling with He shall live for ever and ever and from somewhere above out of camera range He shall live for ever and ever. A new company of singers passes down towards the central focal point and their song is overlaid on the echoes of He shall live for ever and ever. And you suddenly cut to a shot looking up the shaft into the darkness and you get a distant thus saith the lord and into the nearer light, much louder there's a blast of hallelujah and then another balcony comes by with another hallelujah (exactly on time—it's amazing how they've got it figured out) and then it trails echoey willowy round fromeverywhere at once with another hallelujah long-drawn wavery still going by at seven and a half miles an hour and the central platform keeps on coming up, inexorable, with full-throated Thus said the Lord and everybody's scalp tingling and flesh creeping with the insupportable beauty of it all. But the running costs would be high. You gotter face that.

Beautiful it would be with the outstretched arms of the singers as He shall live for ever and ever and you know they're right and you get waves of choking worship in the throat and the scalp tingling with the insupportable beauty of it all and the arms outstretched to brow and toe. Down in the pit of the control room the screens are honey-coloured and lovely and there's a wonderful shot of a figure knelt with fingertips to feet and forehead and it's the background of sand that makes the colour honey-coloured and she is something very like an altar.

You can switch from one to the other of the many screens; on one there's a long shot from the top of the cliff from over the shoulder of the figure still sitting but he doesn't turn round to look in the lens and you cut to the shot from the halfling ship (the camera's mounted, heavily disguised, on the bridge) and you just get a hazy cliffstreak, no detail, and you cut to the one in the ball and socket device and the picture's sliding and wavering but the boulders are clear and the figures are tiny and you cut to the one in the eyes and you open and the greenprint's out of focus and the shoulders are aching and you are close to her and you raise the head and you look at her face.

On her face the look of the floating nun and the sleeping girl and the one on the steamblown station. Of the girl who came on the windy morning out to the top of the cliff to look and the one on the cinquième. And she shall live for ever and ever.

Calm in the dwindling sunlight now that she's dead; praise God for the lovely way she fills the space she fills; lies mutely observing the limitation of her dimensions, inhabits precisely her length and breathless death.

Stay looking at her with the head twisted and the neck beginning to ache and the hands trailed in the sand. Looking at her with the draught of seabreeze fluttering over the shirtless warmth of the back and the toes knuckled into the sand.

Straighten and ease the pain in the neck and the back and the shoulders and the hand goes down to the painless curve of the cheek; fingers lightly over the sacred face. Now haunched and elbowed close to her flank and the face is near; milky white the lovely image fills the eye's awareness.

Fingers lightly over the sacred soft of the cheek; gently the tips of fingers over the brow and down to the point of the nose. Feather-light tip-touch, lovely to do it.

You gotter wonderful thing here lying on the sand with you.

Perfect because of being dead.

Like things in a book are perfect and complete because they stop when you've finished it and none of the good people in the book can ever go wrong like you can. Because they're fixed and final, untouched by the swirl that goes on afterwards. Can never be renegade, faithless, tempted. Irrevocably good.

Privileged fingers trace the form of the face and trace the final face of grace, irrevocably good. A very sweet thing to do.

Like touching the face of God.

Like fingers over the marble lips in the cool gallery and there's no flat warder footfall echoing and you're alone in the flat white light from the gallery skylight. Privately touching the lips of divinity and you come over michaelangelic with the flat white light caressing the merging planes, the brow and nostril touched by the flat white London light. Where the smooth of

the frontal brow goes back to the temple, softly rounding, that's lovely; to watch the flow of the light-touched plane-change. Charged with some old revered significance, the change of the plane of the human temple, but the touch of the seeking fingers brings no real revealing, only the old familiar thrill of awestrike—childlike dumbstrike—womblike wonderstanding.

Smooth of the frontal brow goes back to the temple, merges blondly into the curving hair. No crunch of the warder flatfoot into the bayshore, all you can hear is the worrying fluffling breeze in the sky-wide world and the fiddling water's edge. Round to the water's edge the eyes and the bloody tide is coming in. Been creeping quietly up unseenly hushed and each new swoosh flows nearer.

Up on your feet

and the next new swoosh flows nearer. But you stand and watch it, brushing the sand from the smarting point of the elbow and you watch this next one coming in lazy and harmless but it swooshes up deeper and you figure that it'll take about sixteen swooshes more to get serious.

And you're down obeisant by the stockinged feet, hands gently under the ankles and you gotter pull her away from the quietly ravenous sea that's creeping and fiddling and wants to get her back. Wants to swiggle and gurgle into the lungs and you pull slowly and evenly and she comes beautiful over the sand. Slowly back with reverence for the perfectly dead, back up the steeper slope of the beach where on account of the angle it'll take about six hundred and eighty nine swooshes before it's anywhere near. Very slowly round so that her head'll be up on the higher part so that the blood won't run into the tinge of red and the legs are beautiful again as the skirt of the dress drags up and you come over michaelangelic and you haul slowly backwards. Dead perfection and you've saved her from the ravening fiddling gurgle.

Awful to have had the water spilling and swilling in the nostril and the hair awash and the unprotesting eyes submerged. Awful to have seen the water lapping and glugging the

ears and to have witnessed the drowning of a drowned person.

Most fearful and awful the unprotesting drowning.

And the feet softly down but they fall apart like they did and you hold them together so that they'll get used to it and the eye goes up the dear dead legs and nobody is ashamed any more and her arms in the dragging have come out sideways again and she is most charming and blameless and perfect and you kneel with a knee each side and lightly take the wrists and suddenly there is a great compulsion for the benediction of her hands and you stoop to receive the cool of the palms that you lift to the heat of the flesh of your face.

Most delighting and most perfect.

Surge of prickling warmth that starts in the nape of the neck and spreads up over the scalp and builds up a weight of tears in the forehead. You let them through and the eyes are warm and wet and thankful that she is most delighting and most perfect.

Through tears her most perfect face and the hands all innocent held to your cheeks.

You have come home, somehow, you have come home. That's how it feels, suddenly. Come home to her.

And softly the hands away from the cheeks and down to the sand, neatly. You've come home and you're on to the smart of the elbows, cupped the perfect head in the chalk-dragged hands and you bring the tears up close to her brow and you kiss her with the thankful wet of tears.

Now pressed the chest to the greentaut breast and the sound of the sea swoosh dimly calls. Only the sound of your roaring breathing; only the sound of you with your face pressed close to the perfect face of God.

Oh, lovely God of speech and sight and tears and miracles. God of the growth of grass and counted sand-grains; of life and lust and endlessness, of algebra and unexpected metro-tickets, oh lovely God be praised. Of cancer and syphilis and the wonderful horrible things that you see through microscopes; of the breathless network of interdependency, inter-relationship, contrast and parallel, of cosmic catastrophe and the inscrutable

harmonies of fiddly little crawly things. Architect of all the beauties, designer of tragedy, laughter and parsnips; the great totality. Source of the holy hush, the uproarious joke, the psalm, the fart, the lover's touch. Of palindromes and misprints and lechery and worms; of kicks in the pants and lovely surprises and the lonely look on the face of the next man to die.

And the trick of the sunlight's streak on buildings yet unbuilt.

Heat, light and sound and the gibbering of idiots, scrofula, clematis, dandruff, and butterflies; dogs' dirt, marigolds, dynamos and eyesight. Sweet God of all things be praised with the pounding of the heart and the roaring of the breath and the cling of the hands to the greenprint godful shoulders here on the beach in the dying sunlight. For the press of chest to breast be praised and for the holy headswim praised, sweet God be praised.

This is the lovely awful thing you're doing before the sun goes down. Never such a wonderful lovely awful thing, but gentle, gentle, gentle. Gentle and praising mouth to mouth and you taste the salt but scarcely, sweeten her lips from yours and the heart goes bounding. Bounding, bouncing, gentle, gentle, lovely, lovely, praising praising.

And she shall live for ever and ever. Caught in the honey-coloured spotlight, rising, rising, with the swell of voices all-engulfing and every grain of sand is counted. Tension wells in the singing sinews, rhythmic, rhythmic; here is the brink of unbearable beauty, this is the urgent, wild divinity, this is the way, the truth and the life. Oh endless truthful God be praised for the sweet miraculous revelation, for the rhythmic heart and hands and voices, for every counted grain. Hand goes down for the lovely praising, seeks and praises, finds and praises.

Suddenly there's a honey-coloured picture of the shoes with the socks tucked in them, homely, waiting, sitting in the sand. Left against the right and right against the left, sitting in the sand, neatly. Waiting. Somewhere supreme significance in the mutuality of the right and the left and the left and the right, abundantly satisfying. Mind clings fast to the honey-coloured

picture, clings to the fugitive unfelt meaning, clings and sings, rhythmic, rhythmic.

Sings now with the sacred hiss of heaven's high silence.

Sings and loves; lost in wonder, love and praise.

Dear God of honesty and paradox, dear God of time and tension, unity and sandgrains, here is wonder, love and praise. Here are the singing sinews and the swimming head.

For she is most perfect and complete and final and no touch of lizard, no chill of dawn can change her, no aftermath or second thought defile her. Smiles behind her eyes and contemplates her majesty. Smiles and sees the unity, the interlacing network of relationships, the intricate simplicity, the loveliness of things. Here under the saltless lips and dreaming eyes lies endlessness and calm, charity and mercy, love and heaven's laughter.

Caught in this muted throat the miracle of speech. Locked in there are all the words you ever heard, all the tender human rumbling softnesses, the liquid murmuring play of lip and larynx, Russian and Arabic, Spanish and Welsh. And the milky buttercup words you hear on a summer's day in England.

In the tips of her fingers the touch of silk and sand and living flesh. Of stubble chin and smiling lips. Lovely, lovely touch of fingers.

Lovely, lovely touch of God here on the sand and lovely the mingling tingling urgent praising; holiness sweeps in tides from the nape of the sunbrown neck, the throat is thick with wonder. Almighty and most beautiful God look down with splendour upon this unbearably exquisite thing. Look through one of the multiple godly screens, through the shining sleeping female face, through the snuffling roaring breath that warms her, through the gentle gentle touch of rapture. For thou art most wonderfully God and endlessly everywhere. And this is the holy rhythmic touch of God, the urgent pulsing, wave upon wave, that makes the seasons and the generations, the undeniable effervescent will of God that spills the liberality of desire, spews and thrusts and searches for fulfilment. Oh insupportable

and cherished will of God, sweet excruciation, incredible loveliness, can flesh support this? Cries lurk in the throat and the body hopes to burst in magical extremis. Lovely, lovely, fearful, fearful and the body hopes to burst with praising and everywhere the world is filled with God and praising, great hallelujahs swell and roar.

Cries in the throat and you swell and roar, lovely, godly, lovely, godly; here is the moment . . . approaching now at great speed the moment . . . coming now the moment, the beautiful moment, the moment

of truth . . .

the ineffable . . . paralysing . . . speechless . . .

incomprehensible moment of *truth* . . . O lovely, lovely . . .

. . . lovely lovely the long relinquishing. All suddenly the mind is full of flowers, blossomed and burgeoning in the long relinquishing, brushing the brow of the mind and tenderly scented.

The long relief.

Yes, suddenly full of flowers. And endless sighing vistas of multicoloured comfort. God's sweet relief, God's breathless sweet finality and the hands unclench from the godful shoulder and she is warm from your warmth and wonderfully honey-coloured and you praise God softly, softly with the brush of lip to lip and the long relinquishing goes long and lovely on and you clench again but softly and the high sound of the heavens fades and you breathe and breathe and unclench and clench and she is sweet beneath you. To the very blinding gate of heaven and now the golden glow of long relinquishing. Glory to God in the highest and you clench and unclench with galaxies of fading hallelujahs shafting through the flowers.

And above you the sky fades. Only a fraction, but you noticed.

Glory to God for the fraction of skyfade and glory to God for the noticing. Glory to God for the press of the burning face to the placid face and hark the herald angels sing; flights of angels in the mind's high heaven and softly clench and clasp and thank and brush with quiet lips the quiet lips. And every

grain of sand is counted and the seventeen declensions of Esthonian are known and understood. Within her throat the seventeen declensions of Esthonian and the name of every separate smallest thing in every separate smallest tongue. Grimm's law lives within her and the whole tracery of philological relationships lives within her. Compacted and compressed so that you'd need a thermionic two-stage rectifier tube to see them. They inhabit the wiggly capillaries and interthread the fibres of the larynx, thinning and spreading in endless ramification so that if you saw it on the screen of a traceryscope you'd get a delicious profusion of lacework wiggles, all interconnected and fanwise like the leaves you pick up in the forest that have lain there the winter long and withered and weathered and left only the skeletal tracery. Lives within her, the tracery of Grimm's law, not only the principle but every possible application of it, all at the same time, all clearly understood. Threads and permeates her beauty, endlessly attenuated like the flying Moravian steam, thinning and flying, so that when it gets down to the tips of her toes you'd hardly know it's there at all, but it is; ultimately diluted and exquisite to imagine, so fine it is. And this is only the beginning; because God has interwoven all this with an infinitude of additional though interconnected traceries, one for the declensions of Esthonian and another for the ability to translate into and out of all languages past present and future including Telugu, backslang and bêche-la-mar. And another for knowing instantly whether a language is agglutinative or otherwise and another for an appreciation of the subjunctive. Another for Cyrillic and another for German script. And another that binds and co-ordinates these in an overwhelming network of linguistic virtuosity. She is infinitely and endlessly to be praised. Clench and clasp her infinite virtuosity and praise the God in her that threads and inhabits her.

You may gently bite the sacred larynx there in the offering throat.

And you do.

And every grain is counted and all that was severed is put together and all that was sad is gay and all that was vague is

certain and all that was broken is mended and all that was uncounted is counted.

You get flashes of the overall totality and satisfactoriness of everything, you get knowledge, here on the beach. Suddenly everything fits in, everything that was random is planned, the shoes left to right and right to left and the infinitely complicated ruckle of shirt thrown down that would spread out fine, unravel itself and could be worn as a shirt; every atom of every particle of every thread of which allots to itself, even ruckled, an appropriate beautiful station. Sings with praise of the holy God, even the speechless ruckle of shirt.

Content and wise she lies and the air is full of speech and she has received you and here is the long relinquishing and everything is now counted and understood and lovely.

And everything is part of everything, divinely linked; beauty in the way it is all linked, space time and matter interworking, self-sufficient. Not a fragment over.

This is the way it had to be all the time, this was always at the end of it, waiting for you to come down from the clifftop sundoze, waiting for this finality and total understanding. Clasp and unclasp and you breathe and breathe and the holy larynx whitely offers and you breathe and warm the holy female larynx and she is aware of all inventions and fantasies and languages and experiments and contrivances and nostalgias and ramblings and visions and declensions and she knows all failure and loneliness and exuberance and the blinding light of God and play on words and the frenetical esctasy of running through the grass down a sunlit hillside and the terrible trouble you went to to fix up the sparkle of water out there in the bay. Knows and understands and condones.

Knows fear and your face going foolish white with the whistle of bombs. And what it is like to be a coward and how one hand is smaller than the other and the lovely sound of a long leak under the stars.

The wonderful things and the ugly things. All God's gamut of yes and no, fact and illusion, might and shall.

And the ugly things.

Cry of the tortured, slub of limbs and warm teeth splattering under the truncheon's blow. Chattering madness whimpering and grizzling in cellars when they finally clung to the rubber apron of the interrogator, when they gasped and childlike clung to the bloodsmeared rubber-covered belly and the electric light bulb hung impartially, unblinking.

And the little songs the children sang in long-since Baltic villages and the crystal crunch of snow. And the glow from the Christmas tree.

How it is in the valley of the shadow and how it is to lie down in green pastures with the sound of grasshoppers by the glittering waters of kindliness. All these things. Sweetly clasp and clasp. She is living with your living, warm with your warmth. How you childlike clung to the greentaut belly under the unblinking sun and knelt and loved and had concentric circles of sanctification spreading between the ears and she knows the number of stitches in the stitched-up stocking and what the captain had for dinner and how many grains of sand there are in the wind and how many on the beach.

How when you were little and it was a windy day you thought it was queer that the wind brought nothing in the way of heavenly debris, no scraps of flying angel feathers like you'd get if the wind blew wild through an ordinary home. Always an eye to the scurrying sky for a sight of a mammoth chimney pot or perhaps God's airborne outsize braces. And this she knows and smiles and understands like she does the captain's dinner. Like she does the nearly gull-pecked radicle.

Like she does that the diminutive of radicle is ridicle.

Like about the quavering cruciform coward on the way down and you nearly set your bloody self on fire. Lovely lovely that she knows and smiles and has received you. And blessed you with the sight of God and honey-coloured knowledge, blessed you with her muted multilingual manydiction.

Knows the dimensities of outerstellar space and the distant reaches, the still chill touch of other atmospheres and the spiral hush of limitlessness. Lives in the silent starways the wide black starways and mingles with the word of God that sings in

the spangled black. Of God, creator, consort and cohabitant, loudly silent in the distant reaches. She can hear with the inner midline extra ear, can hear the inaudible, the unspoken and the unhappened. Can hear as every grain of sand is counted, as every star, as every baysplashed sparkle, as every circle of sanctification comes up on the heavenly adding machines. Hears even the microscopic noise of probabilities and hypotheses. The noise of thoughts you decided not to think and ones you'll never even know you couldn't. She can hear a change of heart and an aspiration, a doubt, a care, a longing. And louder noises like the turn of the year and the conception of identical twins. And the growth of your beard and the healing of the cut on your head. The noise of smoke as it curls in the ceiling and the cling of paint on a wall.

The gurgle of unicellular protoplasm, the grunt of the blossoming leaf and the wild roaring of the daffodil.

Hers is the secret world of nooks and crannies and beetles that go plop in puddles and the drifting winds of stellar haze. Hers is the kingdom, the power and the glory all locked up in the larynx, the smile and the midline auricle. Smiles at the ancients and ages yet to pass and fuses then-and-now-and-forever in this one breathless actuality, world without end. Most noble work of the living God and she lies and smiles and asks no suscitation.

Almighty and merciless God, who brings us straight to the blinding gates, who into our sullen waywardness the quick of knowledge breathes, who suffuses us with the divine agony, lights heavenly roman candles in our guts, Thy wonderful and merciless name be quietly and calmly praised. For our creation, consternation and all the blessings of this life we solemnly and childlike thank Thee. Conceiver and creator of complications yet uncounted, intimate of the uttermost distant reaches, keeper and lover of all things, we thine innocent and fearful artifacts who are but evidence of Thee and of Thy loveliness do give Thee most humble and joyful thanks. As we take pleasure and fearfulness in Thee so do we in ourselves take pleasure and fearfulness, because we are members of Thee as the daisies on the

lawn and the screams of the tortured are members of Thee. As are the flailing truncheons and the carcinogens members of Thee. We are Thy dreadful and lovely creatures, Thy fragments; and Thou art the sweet totality a blinding flash of whose dreadfulness and loveliness Thou art mercilessly pleased sometimes to show us. We do not implore or beseech Thee, for Thou art beyond persuasion as Thy law of gravity is beyond persuasion, Thou art final and ultimate. But we greet Thee in the cry of human laughter, in our tears and in our dreams, we meet Thee fleetingly in sudden awful flashes of awareness, in the smell of excrement, in a turn of phrase, in grasshoppers and the joy of voices. For the torture of this our half-knowledge, for the tantalus of our daily lives, our hearts are unfeignedly and burstingly thankful. We thank Thee by our every act but above all we thank Thee by that great fear that Thou hast given us; by our fear of dying.

Thou art the savant of the little wiggly things, organizer of their goings, convenor of their comings, attender to their intricacies, shaper of their inscrutable plans. Thou art architect of the cosmic centrifuge, spinner of neutrons, time-keeper of menstruation, manipulator of the tides. Thou art wind and weather, wine and women and Thou art truly and endlessly fearful and delighting. Our hearts are full of amazement and we praise and magnify Thy holy name. The heavens and the hills and the forest places, the green silences under the waters, the coral and the weed and the rust; the desert and the marsh, the dustbowl badlands and the bland meadows, these are Thine and Thine own fabric and Thou praisest Thine own self in them and we are delighted in them with Thee. And in the myriad other contours among the moons and galaxies and distant places there is praise and these are of Thy dreadful and lovely making and they magnify Thy holy name.

Thou hast fashioned all things and all possible combinations and permutations of things. Thou hast perceived all fleeting and intangible things, all contrivances and conceits, all hidden thinking and all straight-forwardness. Thou knowest all the ends of all beginnings, all conjecture, of all experiment; and

Thou knowest the lattermost link of cause and effect before the first thinking of the first beginning. Thou art the keeper of the mystery of eternity and infinity and of Thine own reasons and Thou knowest no fear of death or censure, nor art Thou beholden or thankful to anyone, nor dost Thou give praise for Thy creation, for Thou art Thine own creator and Thine own praise.

Thou livest among us and within us, we are invested with Thee. No breath is drawn, no eyelid blinked, no sinew flexed without Thy presence and Thine aid. Thou art in our anger and in our compassion, in our horror and our hope. In the touch of human hands and in the sound of human voices Thou art always with us; in us and around us. Thy kingdom is in every instant, here and now and for ever.

From this our turmoil and our vast amazement, from ecstasy and misery, from the glad privilege of mortalness, we greet and praise Thee, God, and magnify Thy holy name.

By our miraculous kinship with Thee and with the world of Thy creation we are at one with all Thy works. With Thee we inhabit the smallest wiggly things and the stagnant waters and the drifting winds of space, all things living and dead we do cohabit with Thee and when the twig is broken so are we broken. This is the holy source of our compassion and our gentleness, for when the blind are blind so are we also blind and when the dead are dead so are we also dead. And this is the lovely measure of our universal kinship, that we have compassion and gentleness. And this is praise.

By our miraculous separateness we are divided against each other and against creation, each to his own surviving; by Thy holy and most merciless ordinance, vanity and selfishness rule our separate ways, for these are the fruits of the holy fear of death. Into each living one of us and into every little wiggly thing hast Thou breathed the will to remain and to multiply, to flourish and to prosper; seed in liberal abundance and the fear of death hast Thou given us and we are in love with ourselves and our surviving. And this is praise.

Out of our compassion and our vanity the lovely tragedy

of Thy creation springs. We are the holy paradox of Thy fashioning, our being eats upon itself and in its consuming is propagated. Our hearts are full of fear and love, O wonderful and merciless God, and we give Thee praise.

O wonderful and merciless God we are tired and human and Thou art the endless loveliness of all things and we drift with the wandering tides of thought and praise that permeate the outer wilderness. The limbs are heavy and thankful with the loveliness of all things, and the clasping hands are remote and complete unto themselves and the lightest of breezes on the sunbrown back revives the instant flesh and fades again. . . .

. . . and you're peaceful with the sinking swaying surge of loveliness and you're full of compassion and vanity and the liberal abundance of the holy touch of God. Softer the breeze and somewhere in the forgotten distance lie the shoes and they are happy too with the drowsing smile of God that links them in their right-and-leftness and their totality. Honey-coloured and infinitely significant the shoes with their kinship and their miraculous separateness and their uncomplaining waiting. Compassionate and gentle, that's what they are. And the holy breath of God comes hushly through the corridors of endlessness, smiling, smiling. Compassionate and gentle and spreading in concentric circles of sanctification and left-and-rightness and honey-coloured kinship. Hushly through the spangling sparkling sandgrains and the burgeoning of flowers. And the limbs are lovely and happy and heavy and thankful and it's all soft and warm and sinking and swaying and you're looking through the gates of endlessness, smiling, smiling.

Oh God, Thy miraculous name be praised, Thy honey-coloured smile be magnified and the gates of endlessness be opened.

And the tired limbs are lovely and happy and lovely and forgotten and it's all warm and thankful and soft and smiling and you are through the gates of endlessness and everywhere there are flowers and the limbs are happy and lovely and heavy with endlessness and the mind is lulled and full of the heavy honey-coloured scent of flowering praiseful thanks and warmful

thankful limbful wonder. Lulled in fitful fading, soft and smiling, warm and sinking. Lost in the holy praise of infinite God.

Oh, lulled and most honey-coloured God, most gracery tracery God with the seldom swoosh of water dimly distant, lovely and fading, lulling and warm. Remote the clasp of hand and fading loins and the smiling flower of God is magnified, all is filled with warming holiness and the tired limbs are lovely and heavy and happy and lulled. Lovely, lovely the afterhaze of loveliness and spins and sings in the tired head the sound of her perfection; spins and sings. . . .

. . . sound of the water again and it's reality suddenly and the smile of God relinquishes and the eyes open and it's frighteningly

black

gone dark and the face gleams lovely up in the darkness

and it's grey

and the head goes round to see the awful night, the sudden frightening night and the neck screws round and the stars are there remarkably and the glow of wonders thins and everything is real and you have *slept*. Night has grown up leisuredly about the beach

and you have been a bloody sleep.

Slipped from the gentle clutch of time and been off independently and the bloody stars are suddenly out and you haven't been here with their coming and she is grey and colourless. She.

Placid beneath you faithfully into the night.

To sleep on her and have been here lying and the merging and the shading of the day and the evening and the night is irrecoverably lost and there is a chill now on the bare of the back and the hands and the belly and the elbows sting with forgotten scoriation and you gotter organize yourself and get collected and face up to the singing stars; but you cling to the fade of honey-coloured lull, cast back to the thinning loveliness, retrieve the loveliness. Back through the mind the way you came. To escape and delay the dark reality but the reality sharpens.

In so short a time, the night. In so short and magical a time and going off bang like that above you. Transformed and unfamiliar lurks the baywide blackness; the night has become accustomed to itself and settled in new grey patterns, scattered with dark. Between you where you darkly touch there lies enlocked the remnant warmth, a film of sunglow spread between you. If you shift or stir or re-arrange you'll let it out. It'll thin in the night air, be gone for ever. Quite still, then, only the head-twist and the passing touch of lips. And the warmth remains and prospers, smiles between the faithful bodies. And the passing touch of lips, softly this way and that, quite overwhelms with faithfulness; there is love again in the darkness and ripples again in the neck.

Lovely the faithful face, pale and lovely.

And you clasp (but you gotter wake up) and the lips are soft and full of mercy, this way and that, softly the passing touch. Softly the tender passing touch, this way and that. Full of thanks and praise in the new-come night, secret and constant. This way and that. She is most truly and completely yours and most secretly and the thanking body shields her from the dark.

Fell a bloody sleep and let the stars come out.

Loud the sea swoosh, louder in the dark, sharper the sound and hearable now much further. Can follow the sough and the sigh and the seigh the whole of the shorelength, lazy, insistent, fiddling, distant, can link in the nape of the mind the invisible headlands; continual runnels of sea swoosh baywide random surging, sharp and clear. And you clasp with the thought of the watery chill and the night sky's distant soaring. Clasp and unclasp and shield her from the distant sky's high soaring. From the dark and the scatter of nameless shadows.

And yourself from the sudden reality.

Must have been hours. Must have been bloody hours and you've been done out of the hours, been swindled. Out of the hours of comprehension and you're faced with the finality of sunlessness and the self-satisfied stars. Too sudden the night. Too unfairly sudden. Savoured and full the sunlit clifftop, each

moment to the best of its ability, each moment of the meeting and the praising in due measure full, full savoured. And now suddenly telescoped, wasted and vanished the lovely day. Smile of the spread of beach is gone and everywhere is foreignness and namelessness. A new and unfamiliar place and the grey sands aloof and nameless. Only here between the faithful bodies pressed the last reality of loveliness and in the clasp of the small shoulders and the mercy of the lips; in these frail and frightened things there still sings praise and the vanished sunshine.

Sound of the shore behind and you lie quite still and listen to the darkness, to the accustomed unexpected sounds of shore-night, sighing and soughing and the sharp cry of the seagull.

Stiffen the back and hear the cry of the seagull.

And you wait under the stars with your back naked to the night and you shield her from the coming cry, nearer and louder of the seagull.

No cry, but it's up there, somewhere, wheeling, white in the night, knowing that you are waiting for its cry, but not crying; just wheeling and waiting and watching. Spread on the night air, white and wheeling and you get prickles in the undefended back because this is the bloody bird come back to wheel and circle and cry. That was obscenely here and you waved and shouted and preserved her from in the sunlight and that you should have hit in the startled backside and sent fluppering and panicking all over the bay and it's come back for her and remembers. But no cry, just wheeling and watching and you wait and tauten and listen and see it through the cranium and the prickling hair and you clasp the childlike shoulders and you don't move at all.

And it goes on up there, swooping and wavering and looking.

Can almost hear it, almost hear the scooping sighing whiffle of breeze in the wings and the ball-and-socket twisting and looking and there's a wedge of awareness from between your shoulder blades that shafts out into the night and registers every swoop and wait and look and swivel and circling wheel.

Too soon, all this, the stars and the nightborne seagull,

unready the sunfilled mind for the dark and the seagull. The bloody bloody seagull.

Too soon, too fast and fearful; unaccustomed.

Must go back to the sun and the praise and the honey-coloured dreaming, to the leisured muzz and the loveliness. Back to the godly thanks and the gate of heaven and we'll take it from there at the normal pace. This isn't how it was going to be, not this sudden transformation and the bloody bird and the night-seaswoosh. Back to before it switched off and we'll take it smoothly from there. Not like this, it wasn't going to be. Too soon and unaccustomed.

But stays inexorably on, the sharp reality; dark reality circles and wheels and any minute now it's going to bust out screaming and keening, wheeling and wailing up there in the black. Defile the remnant loveliness and unbearably sharpen the sharp reality. And you stay still and numb. And listen and shield her. No gull shriek. Sound of the soughing sighing swoosh but no gull shriek.

Could have imagined it, the seagull?

Could have thought you heard it, the distant cry?

No shriek and you lie with her tight, shielding and listening. The eyes close tight and the sun sings hot in the flesh of the face and the ears acutely listen and the clasp is tight to the little shoulders and the ears are tuned to the seaswoosh sighing and you can hear right along the beach acutely, headland to headland, sweeping curve of sighing behind you, and there is the very gentlest sound of the breeze in the sand, of the counted millions of sand-grains tinily shifting and somewhere along the shore, away to the left, there is the gentle scarcely hearable tread of someone walking.

Round to the sound the eyes with the mouth dry

and it's someone walking

towards you along the beach with a light flashing

terribly near, black silhouette against the stars and the heart goes racing and the scalp prickles and the light is a torch in his hand and he's walking

towards you, already terribly near, matter of yards but you

didn't hear and the light skims flashly over the sand and stops and wavers and picks things out and they all look different now with wavering shadows and he's coming along the line of the seaweed coming along the line of seaweed searching and looking. Coming along with the leaping searching scud of light before him and the paralysed eyes are fixed and the mouth is open and she lies faithfully quiet, the bursting heart against her. Terribly near, the man advancing and there is no time, too fast, too soon. This isn't the way it was going to be, too fast and unaccustomed and you tear the stare from the awful advancing, and the head goes down to shield her cheek from the searching light and the stubble of chin digs into the innocent shoulder. And the mind takes in the tail-end sight of the figure against the stars and you see in the frightened tail-end sight that in his other hand he's got a pair of shoes, bringing them to you, the lovely honey-coloured shoes, and you're transfixed and frozen and you gaze wide-eyed at the dark of the sand with the chin dug fierce in the faithful shoulder. Not like this, it wasn't going to be, not like this, Oh holy God. Gaze wide-eyed and mouthdry into the beach with the noise of the breathing roaring terribly loud and the chest thumping and pounding with the heart trying to get out and suddenly the light flows into the dark of the vision of sand.

The light is on you paralysingly,

fleetingly, and wanders off and it's dark again

and the seaswoosh sounds in the suspended moment, clear and loud and the light comes back

and stays

and you are locked in the fearful light and you press and clasp and shield. Flooded with yellow light, the close sight of sandgrains. Gold and lovely and close and each grain is clear and sharp and distinct and they fill the field of vision, honey-coloured. So close and clear you could count them.

The Lovely Awful Thing

MAURICE
RICKARDS

The New Authors Guild

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS NEW YORK

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DIRECTOR

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There was considerable divergence of opinion in the case of *The Lovely Awful Thing*, both in England and in this country.

From Report 1 (English)

> "It really is a staggeringly interesting piece of writing, not without its faults, but yet so heightened and luminous and tremulous with its own brilliant vision that what would undoubtedly be rank nonsense and intolerable in the case of a lesser writer is somehow made acceptable in this instance by a poised, unflagging daring, both in style and in imaginative content."

From Report 2 (English)

> "As I see it, this is a sustained – an astonishingly well sustained – nightmare. It is written in a manner which suggests a family tree compounded of James Joyce, Dylan Thomas and Samuel Beckett; and has some affinities with J. P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*."

From Report 3 (English)

"I wonder if the author is medical adviser to a morgue."

From Report 4 (American)

"A story outline seems impossible here, for the text contains only remote intimations of a story line. Writing like this requires of the general reader a suspension of the criteria by which he usually judges the fare offered him. The ordinary routine of publicizing and selling is made infinitely difficult, for what can you promise a reader — only what he himself brings to the reading. The fascination it exerts can scarcely be put into works, let alone crystallized in an effective blurb. We occasionally take refuge in saying that a book is special in its appeal, requiring special methods — Well, here is one if I ever saw one."

From Report 5 (American)

"This is, all in all, an extremely effective piece of writing. It is a virtuoso performance and not a novel. The author-narrator indulges himself in all kinds of mental pyrotechnics, some prankish, some lyrical, etc., as he surveys the bay below him, and, finally, acts within the scene he has created for himself. The author is indulging himself — and the results, given the premise, are impressive. For a stream-of-consciousness book this is awfully good."

About the Author

Maurice Rickards, poster artist, publicity consultant, photographer, was born in London in 1919. He was educated at Marylebone Grammar School but left when he was fifteen to study at Westminster School of Art and then joined the Carlton Studios. When the war started he signed on as a conscientious objector and volunteered for relief work and as a "guinea pig" in malaria research, but he was put on the land where he worked as a cow-man. He says his education was pretty nearly completed when he did social relief work in a Methodist mission in Walworth.

After the war he started his own studio, producing publicity material for a wide range of clients. Many of his posters are well-known features of the publicity world. A member of the Society of Industrial Artists and of the Institute of British Photographers, Rickards has worked as a creative free-lance designer in various media. He is married to an Italian girl and lives above her family's Soho restaurant.

The Lovely Awful Thing